

AZALIM

A ROMANCE OF OLD JUDEA

BY 
MARK ASHTON

Wm. J. Condit.

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AZALIM

A Romance of Old Judea

Works of
MARK ASHTON



SHE STANDS ALONE

The Story of Pilate's Wife



AZALIM

A Romance of Old Judea



L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

New England Building, Boston, Mass.

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A Romance of Old Judea

By MARK ASHTON

Author of "SHE STANDS ALONE," etc.

Illustrated



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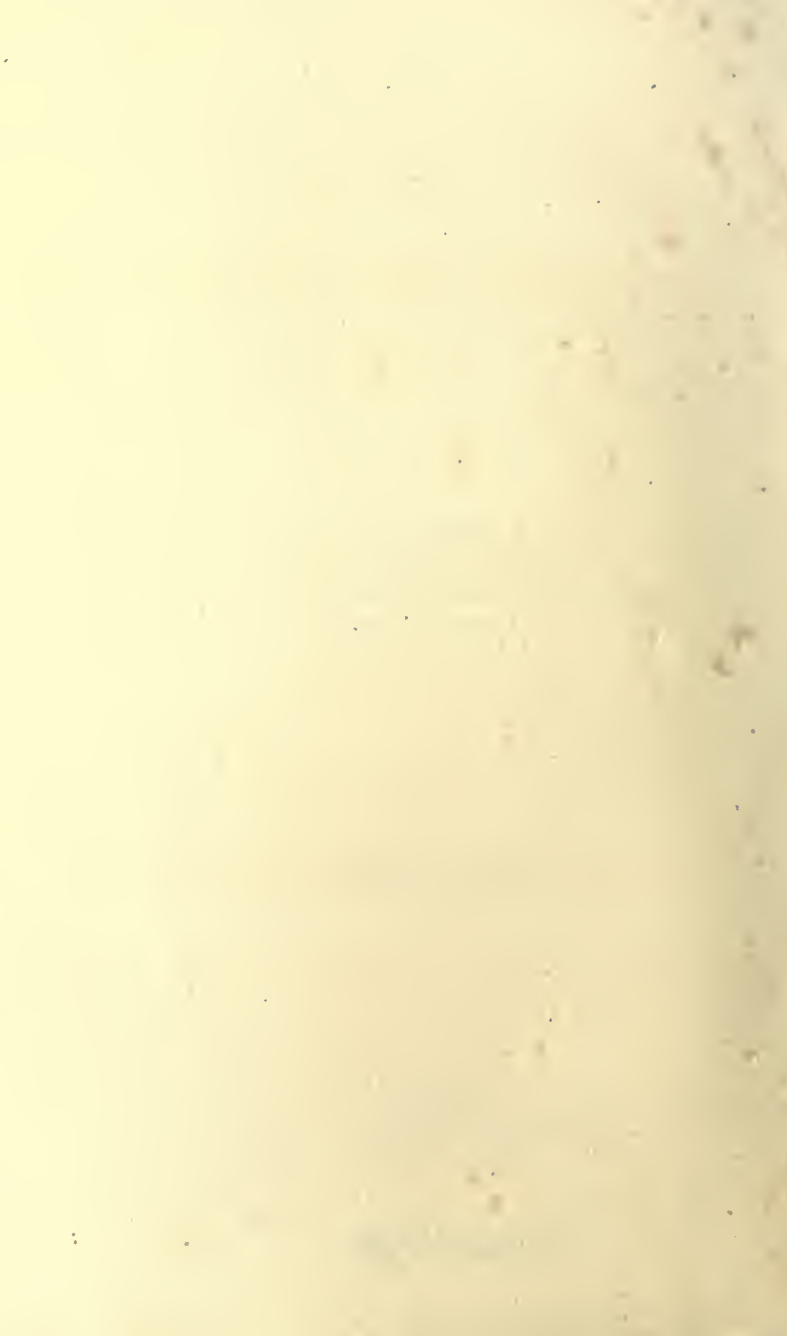
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TO
THE READERS
WHO SO KINDLY RECEIVED
"SHE STANDS ALONE," MY STORY OF PILATE'S WIFE
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

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Preface

THERE appears to be a tendency in modern Christianity to neglect, if not to ignore, the books of the Old Testament. Yet when our Lord said, "Search the Scriptures, for they are they which testify of me," there were none others extant beside these, and it cannot therefore be right to undervalue them. With this fact before me, a strong desire came to write a book that might at once excite and revive an interest in the events and characters of old Biblical history.

M. A.



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AZALIM

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CHAPTER I.

JEZEBEL

JERUSALEM the golden claims the first rank among the cities of the world. Rome the eternal occupies the second, and to which one can we more fitly accord the third than to Damascus the beautiful, which, cradled in the Lebanon, and set like a fair gem in the lovely plain watered by Abana and Pharpar, lays claim to be the only city in history which is at once both ancient and modern, for, whilst her origin is lost in the mists of the earliest ages, she remains prosperous and populous in this, our twentieth century.

Babylon, Nineveh, Troy, may possibly rival her in antiquity. But Babylon is the habitation of dragons,

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and a court for owls; Nineveh a mere quarry for the museums of the West; whilst Troy, were it not for the song of the poet, would be only a shadowy myth. All these once famous cities have passed away; whilst Damascus — flourishing when Zion was a solitary hill, and Rome a swamp of the Tiber — prominent in the old and new records of the imperishable Book — respected and spared by her powerful neighbours, the great empires — celebrated for arts and manufactures — rich in Eastern story and romance — honoured by the Crusader — cherished by the Moslem — holds her own to the present day.

It is at this charmed city of Damascus, three thousand years ago, that the following history opens.

The dawn was at hand, and all the inhabitants of the city were astir to hail the reappearance of the great sun-god, whom, under the name of Baal, all Syria and a large portion of Asia worshipped. Not one living soul remained under a roof. The men filled the streets. The women and children crowded the house-tops, or stood outside their lattices. The sick lay on their beds at the open doors. Every face was turned to the brightening sky, every heart beat with expectancy.

The heavens flamed with amber, purples, and

crimsons, in vivid colouring and wondrous combinations, — the banners of the mighty monarch's imperial approach. Suddenly, the first disc of the great orb uprose from the horizon, and a simultaneous shout from the assembled multitude welcomed the advent. "All hail to thee, great Baal, thou Lord of life and light! Hail! Hail! All hail our King and our God! Hail! Hail! All hail!"

Then every man fell prostrate with his forehead touching the ground; the women and children dropped upon their knees; the sick covered their faces with their hands, and thus they all remained until the blazing luminary had cleared the horizon, when all rose to their feet, and repeated their aves as their sun-god began to climb to his throne in the mid-heavens.

It was grand — this universal homage to the god whom the worshippers styled the lord of light and life! True, it was idolatry. The natural religion of man *is* idolatry, — it runs in his blood, his mind of itself can conceive, his soul desires, no other, — but in this case it was purged from the degradation of image-worship and freed from the iniquities of the temple and the abominations of the groves. It was an ovation so pure and simple that, had it always been thus offered, the great Creator of their sun-god might possibly have pardoned its ignorance,

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and revealed to the worshippers a more excellent way.

On the flat roof of a house close to the western gate of the city, a woman was reclining on a couch under a white awning lined with rose colour of the softest hue of Tyrian dyes. She had been very demonstrative in her devotions, assisting them with repeated kisses and abjurations to a little image of Baal she held in her hand, and to which, with the not uncommon fondness of feminine nature for religious toys, she principally addressed her prayers. It was an ugly idol of a species of green onyx or jade, with a broad flat face around which spikes represented the sun's rays, and with the body of a lioness couchant.

She possessed a striking personality, this woman. Young she was, so young that hers would have been the age of a schoolgirl in the chilly West, but the unripe term of girl does not suit Eastern women, and still less would it have defined this one, so perfectly matured and grandly developed.

Massive in form and face, with the imperious gait and movement of an empress, and the royal contours and turn of head and neck of a queen, with well-cut, regular features and hair of the finest texture, and of such abundance that when it fell around her it clothed her like a garment, she might

have been the original of one of those busts or medallions of the wives who shared the throne of the Cæsars, which have come down to us, and, in truth, she might have been Cæsar himself, for in that broad — and, in repose, somewhat sullen — brow and the firm square jaw, the brains and force of will of a man were added to the superb magnificence of her physique.

Yet, if it were possible to find an eye sufficiently unglamoured by her beauty, and keen enough to mark defects, it would have found something sinister in that face, at once so unique and so perfect. To begin with, the eyes which looked so seductively large and languishing owed their size and liquid lustre to the dark colouring so dexterously applied to lids and lashes. Naturally they were small and not especially bright. In truth, they were of the Chinese almond-oval type, and, when in repose, wore a snaky gleam, as if their owner were coiled apparently asleep, but really was stealthily watching; and when anger moved her, there flashed a serpentine dart of fury, denoting the venom that lay behind.

Her mouth also, so firm and well formed, disclosed, when open, thick pads of flesh under the rosy lips, and the white, regular teeth had a way of snapping sharply together now and then, not unlike a wild creature seeking its prey; at the corners of

her mouth, lines, slight as yet, curving downward, indicated cruelty, and sharp, straight ones hinted at violence of temper. Moreover, her skin was rather swarthy, but this was entirely concealed by some pigments so subtle of manufacture and so skilful of application as almost to escape detection.

She was rich as well as beautiful, this favourite of her gods, or, as we should say, of Fortune. Her dress was literally purple and fine linen, of the most costly materials and finest embroidery Damascus could produce, and the gems in her bracelets, earrings, and the tire of her head shone like stars. There were no imitation stones three thousand years ago. The daughters of Shem did not and do not change their garments several times a day, and the fashion of them every three months, as do the daughters of Japhet. Their apparel was the same morning and evening, and often they rested on their coverless beds with only loosened robes, for no metallic casements imprisoned their frames, and the light loose clothing followed the natural outlines of the body. They wore the modes their mothers wore before them, for "unchangeable" is the motto of the Asiatic signet-ring.

Her surroundings likewise denoted wealth. The house she inhabited was only inferior in size and garnishing to the palaces of the city, and the servants

who gathered on the roof to join in the aves of Baal were numerous, well clothed, well fed, and well trained; on a small table near the awning refreshments of finest wheaten cakes, wine, and water were arranged in cups and ewers of gold and silver, the workmanship of which would have driven Benvenuto Cellini to despair, while the pottery, which we call Phœnician, but was really that of the Canaanites and Philistines of the Bible, might in form and purity put what we call "high art" to shame.

This woman was Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the high priest of the great temple of Baalbec, one of the most, perhaps *the* most, powerful man in the East. No pope of the dark ages ever wielded greater sway over the bodies, minds, and souls of men than did this man, Baal's vice-regent, the living human representative of the sun-god. Nay, no pope of mediæval times could boast, like Ethbaal, that he had not one heretic or spiritual rebel in his dominion; like another Hildebrand, he could put his foot upon the necks of kings, and acknowledge no power superior to his sacerdotal office, which, as he was a man of great ability and arrogant temper, he held with despotic sway.

Such was the father of Jezebel, but what of, and who was, her mother?

Similar to the vestal fire and the virgins of pagan-

ism was the institution in Baal-worship of the sacred flame. The sun — so affirmed the priests and so believed the worshippers — had darted upon and within the vast temple of Baalbec a sacred fire, which was kept alive by a community of vestals bound by the same vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience as a Christian nun. They were always selected for beauty of person, and, when time withered those charms, were attached to the temple in other offices. So great were the honours of the position, so many the advantages, and so terrible the penalty of violated vows, that the latter event rarely occurred, and the vestal virgins of the sun reflected a bright light of purity amidst the impurities of heathendom.

Ethbaal — under a different name — was a young aspirant for the priesthood, and the old, old story of forbidden love broke the unsullied record of the vestal sisterhood, for he loved and was beloved by the youngest and fairest of the sacred band. Of course, the intrigue could not be hid, and another story as old as the first took place. The punishment fell upon the woman; the man escaped.

No braves and squaws dancing around the fire-stake of a captive, no inquisitor bending over the rack of a heretic, ever witnessed a more lingering and horrible agony than overtook the unhappy vestal.

The night before her death-tortures were to commence, Ethbaal obtained an interview with the destined victim. His was no "light of love." He would have given all but his life to have called her his wife in the sight of gods and men, but it could not be. It was a farewell of anguish, and Ethbaal swore by the gods to his doomed love that he would save now, and never desert hereafter, the infant to whom she had given birth, and whom she placed in his arms whilst he took the oath. This child was condemned to be flung into the flames to Moloch, whose altar, dedicated to such holocausts, was reared in a subterranean hall in the temple of Baalbec. Every infant born in or within a certain radius of the temple was thus destined; but if the father recognized and claimed it, the little body was enclosed in a fireproof case and passed swiftly and safely through the flames, and the babe was restored to the father and considered fully dedicated by the unholy baptism.

Ethbaal kept his pledge, and, when the priest was about to fling the child into the flames, he boldly confessed his paternal relationship and claimed his right. It was accorded. The infant was dedicated and given scathless to Ethbaal. Then the priest ordered the seizure of the guilty parent, but he had instantly disappeared into the labyrinths of the tem-

ple and effected his escape with his infant daughter to Tyre, where he had many relatives and friends.

Here he placed the little Jezebel — as he called her, after her mother — in good keeping, and for some years followed a mercantile and commercial life, visiting strange countries, making successful ventures, and finally returning to Baalbec with wealth at his command, again entered the priesthood and ultimately rose to its highest rank, for Ethbaal was a man to rise to the summit of any undertaking he elected to follow.

He removed Jezebel to Damascus, giving her every educational advantage suitable for women of her race and much that was meant only for men. She read, she wrote, she played musical instruments indifferently well, she studied astronomy and excelled in astrology, and no modern actress or society woman could have excelled her in the art of enhancing feminine beauty and concealing its defects. In short, as she budded into womanhood she was the most celebrated and the most admired woman in Damascus.

It is well to be reminded at this point that the women of the East three thousand years ago were not the oppressed and degraded beings they are in the present day. The false prophet had not yet brought with him the atrocious doctrine that women

had no souls; and his predecessors had not instituted the cruel custom of shutting them up for life within stone walls under the name of marriage. Until the blight of the Moslem fell upon the East, its women were by no means to be commiserated. They were at liberty to go abroad, the veil being voluntary, not compulsory, wear adopted for privacy or protection. They could hold independent property, were admitted to the companionship of their lords, were honoured for motherhood and feminine virtue; their household skill and accomplishments were highly praised and appreciated, whilst, if opportunity and ability allowed, the highest authority was accorded them, and a Semiramis and a Jezebel wielded a power which throws that of our Catherines and Elizabeths into the shade. The women of a greater or less portion of the three old continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe owe their present debasement to Mahomet and his followers, as the Christian woman has received her freedom, dignity, and emancipation from the Christ. It is needful to bear in mind the contrasted condition of Asiatic women now and then, in order to understand the independence of life and action in the feminine characters of this history.

It is not to be supposed, however, that so great and

sagacious a man as Ethbaal would leave his young and beautiful daughter unprotected in a large city like Damascus. The prudent priest had provided a guard more watchful than the sleepy dragon of the Hesperides, more vigilant than a Spanish duenna of the eighteenth, and far stricter than an English chaperon of the past nineteenth, century. This was the eunuch Gehanan, the steward of the house provided for Jezebel, a very subtle man, and one whom the high priest could trust thoroughly to keep away all lovers and suitors from his daughter until he had selected a husband whose position and riches should justify his own ambition. So well had Gehanan fulfilled this duty that Jezebel, although the most admired and talked of maiden in Damascus, and herself at this time professing no other thought or wish save for the homage and adoration of men, had never yet been engaged in the most innocent of love passages, nay, had scarcely even had the opportunity of amusing herself with what we should call a mere flirtation.

Gehanan conducted his surveillance with consummate skill. The personal liberty of his master's daughter was never interfered with. Her goings out and comings in were apparently as unfettered as the air she breathed, and yet, like the atmosphere

that surrounded her, she did not see, she was scarcely aware she felt it, but all the same she knew that Gehanan's watchful care pervaded her every movement, attended her uprisings and downsittings, and never relaxed its unwearied oversight.

They were covert enemies. The eunuch hated Jezebel for her gifts and haughty demeanour to himself, and she returned the feeling a hundredfold, treasuring up future vengeance against him for his interference with her life and longed-for pleasures. She watched him closely, hoping to find an occasion to accuse him to her father, and thus compass his dismissal.

It was not long before she discovered what she sought; Gehanan's vice was avarice, and it was insatiable. To add to his store he systematically defrauded the chief priest, and Jezebel obtained clear proofs of his dishonesty.

"My father," she said, triumphantly, "it is my duty to tell you that your steward takes bribes from the merchants, and sells at least a tithe of all goods that come into this house."

"I know it, my daughter," returned Ethbaal. "He robs me without mercy, but then, as he allows no other man to steal from me but himself, I have reckoned clearly that I am a gainer in the end."

Jezebel possessed the intuitive quickness of a

woman, as well as the harder reason of a man, and she made no further effort to displace Gehanan. She divined, and justly, that it would be useless to again attempt to do so.

CHAPTER II.

AZALIM

THE excitement of the morning devotion over, Jezebel, like the other inhabitants of Damascus, turned to the affairs of life. The ennui which ever hangs over the leisure of the rich oppressed her, and she looked around for some distraction with which to dispel its shadow.

The house in which she dwelt was a large, square one, facing each quarter of the compass. The north commanded the distant Lebanon; the east overlooked the city; the west, the gates leading to the land of Israel; and the south looked straight down into the great slave-market, where the captives in war and the bondsmen of service were bought like beasts of burden, or herds and flocks of the field.

Jezebel leaned over the balustrade giving on the streets, amusing herself with the lively passing and business below, when sounds proceeding from the opposite side caused her to follow them and to perceive a band of Syrian soldiers returning with

their spoils from a raid over the rich lands of Gilead. All discipline was relaxed, and the blare of ram's-horn trumpets, the clash of cymbals, and the bellowing of a frightened, overdriven drove of cattle mingled with the shouts of the soldiers, the cries of the camp-followers, and the groans of the miserable captives, who were bound together by ropes in gangs and subjected to the blows and insults of their captors.

The captain of this company was one of Jezebel's numerous admirers, and when he approached the gate she waved a scrap of her favourite rose colour to him. Like the knight of a tournament, he ordered a halt to his chariot, stood up, and waved a like-coloured trifle he took from a crevice of his armour, and, fixing it on the top of his lance, lowered it toward her as if in presentation. Then, as a soldier on duty who has other things to do besides paying homage to fair women, he drove through the open gates into the slave-market, followed by his train. The cattle were driven into an adjoining corral, a space was cleared in the market, the slaves were liberated from their cords, and the division of spoils was adjudged by the captain and his officers.

Jezebel's delight at this scene was unbounded. The cruel down-curved lines at the corners of her mouth deepened with pleasure as she marked the

sufferings of the prisoners and the wounds of the soldiers, for the latter had not escaped unhurt. The whole scene satisfied her. After awhile she tired of this amusement, and, seeking variety, her eyes fell upon a figure standing somewhat apart from the crowd of captives, which at once fixed her attention and roused her interest.

This person was a young man of some twenty years, perhaps, clad in the garb of a herdsman of Gilead. A tunic of finest sheep's wool, dyed a golden brown and made in one piece, reached from his shoulders to below his knees, closely fitting his shape, and leaving neck, arms, and legs bare. A herdsman's long whip, coiled carefully around his arm, hung over his back, and a sheep dirk-knife was thrust into the belt around his waist. This must have been heedlessly overlooked by the soldiery, for it would have been a formidable weapon had he found an opportunity of using it. Jezebel was as enthusiastic an appreciator of masculine comeliness as many men are connoisseurs in feminine beauty, and the physique of this young Hebrew struck her fancy with decided approval, though she noted a peculiarity in the young man. His hair was not cut after the fashion of either Syria or Israel, but fell on his shoulders in seven thick locks. Jezebel thought the mode became the wearer, yet, not being the cus-

tomary one, it displeased her eye, and she wondered why so young and goodly a man should thus render himself unlike his fellows. She was ignorant of the vow of the Israelite Nazarite, indicated by the unshorn head, and to which this young herdsman had been devoted from — nay, before — his birth.

The seed of Abraham we gather to have been of unusual bodily perfection three thousand years ago. Those two special favourites of Jehovah, David and Joseph, were eminent for personal gifts, yet they can scarcely have surpassed those of this young Azalim the Tishbite, of Gilead. Perfect in limb and frame as a god of old pagan Greece, alert and graceful in every movement as a panther on the spring, with an air of abounding health and strength clothing him as with a garment, with features fine and noble, — what wonder that Jezebel appreciated and admired such rare perfection.

But when she looked more closely on his face, she saw there a fixed look of hopeless misery which, in one less attractive, would have excited her contempt, or gratified her cruelty; as it was, it only increased her interest in the goodly stranger.

Truly the young Hebrew had cause for his despair. At the very apex of his good fortune, the climax of his happiness, the deluge had overwhelmed him. On this same eve he was to have married

Zillah, the daughter of Phanuel, a man of great substance in the land, and this wild herd of cattle had been part of her dower. Not that he thought of dower when he thought of Zillah. His love for her was like that of his forefather Jacob for his foremother Rachel. He was of the tribe of Manasseh, — his life-service would have been but as one day's work to purchase his bride, and now she was lost to him for ever, for there was no exchange of prisoners of war three thousand years ago.

And what a life there was before him. The menial slave in a Syrian family or a doorkeeper in the house of their gods; a prisoner stifled under roofs and within walls! He, whose life almost from birth had been spent in God's open air! He who had lived amongst the mêlée of horns and hoofs and heads, to whom the crack of the whip and the stampede of the herd was as the trumpet and charge of the battle! "O God of my fathers!" he groaned. "Why hast thou thus dealt with me?"

At this supreme moment of his wretchedness, a great commotion and confusion arose in the market. The captured cattle, insecurely fastened into their enclosure, had broken out, and, rushing through the still open gate of the city, were scattering over the plain, eagerly cropping the sweet, rich grass which the well-irrigated land supplied. In a moment Aza-

lim was on the alert. The instincts of the herdsman overcame all thought of personal trouble. He caught up one of the long ropes which had bound the prisoners together, selected three smooth stones which lay ready to steady the tent-pegs of the merchants, drew his hunter's knife from his girdle, and, with incredible quickness, fashioned a weapon resembling a bolas, such as is used in the South American pampas. Then, springing on the empty saddle of one of the soldier's horses, he galloped from the gate into the midst of the herd.

He knew his cattle and they knew him, for he had been Phanuel's chief herdsman almost from boyhood, and as he uncoiled and flung out the long lash of his cattle-whip and called in the language they knew so well and had obeyed so docilely, it seemed as if he would rally and bring back the herd, but he soon changed his purpose. An enormous bull of Bashan, evidently the leader, was feeding in advance of the rest, and, when aware of the pursuit, he uttered a loud bellow and started off in the direction of Gilead; the young bull aids-de-camp and obedient cows and heifers threw off their allegiance to their accustomed chief, and galloped after the leader of their own kind.

Azalim perceived the hopelessness of endeavouring to gather the herd, and, indeed, he had enough

to do for a few minutes to manage his war-horse, who, unflinching in the battle, was restive as an unbroken colt in the midst of the terrified, half-maddened cattle, and, by every possible way and trick that a horse can practise, tried to throw his rider. He might as well have endeavoured to shake off one of his own limbs, and, at length, realizing the impotency of his attempts, the animal submitted to his new-found master. The latter, disentangling himself from the crowd of cattle, headed for the monstrous bull leader, whom he soon overtook, and to whom he shouted in a speech and tone which had never until now been disregarded, for Gozan — the creature's name — had hitherto been submissive as a dog to the herdsman's voice.

A stroke of lightning had killed Gozan's mother a week after his birth, as she lay with her young calf under a tree, and Azalim's hand, dipped in a bowl of milk, gave food and comfort to the baby bull until it could fend for itself, and, though so fierce to all others as to be the terror of the country round, the beast was always docile with Azalim.

But liberty was stronger than love and gratitude, and, instead of obeying, Gozan thundered on in flight, until Azalim outstripped, then turned and faced, the huge beast.

Gozan bellowed hoarsely, lowered his head for

a moment or two, and then tried to evade his enemy and continue his flight, but this the herdsman prevented by the most skilful horsemanship. The bull tore up the grass, and again lowered his horns for an attack.

After a short skirmish of wonderful agility on the part of the horseman, and of blind onsets of brute force by the bull, Azalim brought the contest to a close. He reined up his horse before a slight rise of the ground. The huge bull, with head lowered between his fore legs, blundered at rather than charged his antagonist, and, not perceiving the elevation, stumbled upon it. Azalim, at this moment, threw the bolas around its hind legs. The animal, thus unexpectedly assailed, lost balance and footing, and fell with a thud that shook the ground.

In a moment Azalim was on his feet, fastened the bridle of his horse to a tree near by, and threw himself on the body of the fallen bull, whispering, as he did so, into Gozan's ear. The struggles of the animal ceased, and, as his master's hand fell near its mouth, either some dull sense of memory or the returning habit of subjection caused the creature to put out its tongue and fold the fingers near him in the same way in which long before he had accepted sustenance from the young lad in place of his mother.

The herdsman now disentangled the balls of the bolas, quickly cast them away, and made a running noose at the end of the rope, which he attached to the horns of Gozan, and ordered him to arise. The great bull floundered to his feet. Azalim, still holding the lasso, led him to the horse, mounted, and the trio galloped back to the city.

A considerable crowd had gathered outside the gates to witness this spectacle, and not one individual amongst them was more intensely interested in its progress than the daughter of Ethbaal. She had watched the play with eyes that had almost the range and power of a field-glass, and seconded the approving shouts and cheers of the people by her own cries, clapping of hands, and waving of drapery. All the time there mingled with her admiration a half-unconscious regret that this gifted youth was doubtless making the exhibition only a feint to escape, and that she should see him no more.

But when he rode back through the gate, leading the great bull, and followed by the cattle and the populace, and resumed his place in the market with the same expression of despair as before, something of contempt mingled with her approval, finding vent in the exclamation:

“Thou wonderful well-favoured fool, to come back when thou mightest have escaped.”

In truth, it was unaccountable that the captive, with the advantage of so good a start on a fleet horse, should so recklessly have thrown the chance away.

"Ah, well," soliloquized Jezebel, "as he *has* come back, he shall be bought as a slave for my household."

She beckoned to one of her maidens, who had been permitted to see the show from the roof, and said:

"Bid Gehanan come to me."

Gehanan obeyed the summons of his young mistress, and, as he reached the housetop, bowed low before her, almost touching the ground with his forehead.

"What is thy command, O daughter of the great Ethbaal?" he said. "It shall be obeyed even to the cost of my life."

"I wish the Israelite captive, who has just rescued the captain's cattle, to be bought as my servant, to direct my Nubians, see after my watch-dog, my camel, and my white ass. Let no time be lost, Gehanan, for my will is set upon his possession."

Gehanan was indolent and heavy of figure, with a smooth, inscrutable face and downcast eyes that yet saw and noted everything. The eagerness of the manner and the evident interest his young mistress

took in the young Hebrew had not escaped him. He made his own comment upon it, and resolved to act accordingly.

"I hear and obey, daughter of Ethbaal," he answered, with another obeisance. As he turned to go, Jezebel called him back.

"Send him in at once," she said, "for he is hungry and travel-worn, and my servants shall attend to his wants."

"Thy will shall be done, daughter of Ethbaal," replied the obsequious steward, but as he departed for the market, he muttered, "No dog of an Israelite shall be thy minion, thou insolent daughter of as insolent a priest."

Gehanan went at once to the merchant who had bought all the captives from the captain, and, with a secret bribe, obtained a promise that Azalim should be assigned to the service of the gods. He then arranged that until the evening the young herdsman should remain at the house of the daughter of the high priest. This was a wily ruse of the eunuch's; as, while it appeared he had complied with his mistress's will, it gave the merchant time to sell Azalim.

The captive accordingly was brought into the presence of Jezebel; and a sorry figure he presented on nearer view. His raiment was torn, he bore the

marks of blows on his person, and his face was deadly pale with privation and despair. Jezebel, callous as she was in general to the sufferings of others, was touched by his appearance.

“Thou art sick, O son of Israel,” she half-whispered in a soft, sympathetic tone. “My people shall give thee food, rest, and whole clothing, and in the service of the daughter of Ethbaal thou shalt find no lack in the future.”

The anguish of Azalim’s mind and the sufferings of his body so mastered his being that he did not realize or comprehend her, and he made no reply.

“One question before thou goest,” she said, somewhat coldly. “Why, when you had so fair an opportunity of escape, did you not avail yourself of it?”

Azalim understood her now. “Because,” he answered, “your Syrian captain pitied the torture of my bound limbs, and offered to free them if I would give my word not to attempt to escape so long as I was under his charge.”

“And you were fool enough to keep your word when its forfeit would have given you freedom,” remarked Jezebel, with an accent of supreme contempt.

“I am no son of Belial to have broken it,” re-

torted Azalim, with equal scorn. "The chosen people of Jehovah, the God of truth, dare not lie!"

"Then he is no God for me!" jeered Jezebel. "Why, stranger, lying is an art. They who know not how to lie, know not how to live. The worshippers of thy God," she added, returning to the first person, "must be of the simple ones, who lack understanding."

The hot flush on Azalim's pale cheek, and the angry flash in his eye, warned Jezebel to change the subject, and, turning to her servants, she said in Syriac:

"Take him to the bath, shave off those seven locks, which, however becoming to the Israelite, is not the Syrian usage, dress him in the tunic of servitude, give him wine and meat, and a rest in the noontide heat, and then I will again speak to him."

Ethbaal's daughter, as has been said, was cultured in all the learning of her age, and was an excellent linguist, speaking Hebrew fluently, but the young herdsman knew no tongue but his own, and, naturally, did not understand her order. He had been used to bathe alone in the tributaries of the Jordan, and was ill pleased to find the attendants remaining with him to assist his ablutions in the great marble bath. But when one of them approached him, razor

in hand, and, laying hold of one of his large locks, raised the weapon to sever it, no professional modern pugilist could have given a better directed stroke than that with which Azalim struck the would-be operator to the ground, sending the razor flying after him. The others present hastily assisted their fellow to his feet and fled from the place. The young Hebrew refreshed himself with the bath, dressed in the garments provided for him, and passed into the outer room, where two of the servants were waiting. These signed him to be seated at a table on which a meal of goat flesh, fine wheaten bread, fruits, and red wine was soon placed.

No wine or strong drink had ever touched the lips of the young Nazarite. Even its proximity was a pollution. Seizing the ewer which contained the liquor, he emptied it on the ground, and, filling a goblet with the water also provided, made a meal which a less hungry and more fastidious man might well have enjoyed. When he had finished he was conducted to a couch, on which he lay down, to complete by rest and sleep the restoration begun by the bath and food.

Of course, the captive's conduct was reported by the servants to their mistress, who, to their surprise, instead of showing displeasure, appeared amused, even pleased, by the recital.

“I am glad he has the spirit of the gods, and not of men or mice,” she exclaimed, laughingly. “We shall soon tame him to our Syrian customs.”

When Azalim awoke, after many hours of sleep, it was to find himself lying on a couch in a spacious hall paved with coloured marbles, in which, here and there, fountains threw up their silvery spray and sparkled in the light. From a doorway opening on a delightful garden a soft fresh breeze stole in, with the song of birds from an aviary of lattice-work, and opposite him, within an alcove, a beautiful woman, dressed in the richest stuffs and adorned with radiant gems, reclined on a heap of cushions. On either side of her stood a Nubian boy, exactly alike, and black as ebony. One youth was attired in a scarlet tunic embroidered in silver, and the other was vested in a white garment similarly fashioned and bordered with gold. The scarlet-clothed youth held an enormous fan of white feathers, and the other one of scarlet, with which they gently fanned the air around their mistress.

Azalim at once recognized the woman to whom he had already been presented, and he left his couch and bowed low before her.

“Approach, young Hebrew,” she said, graciously. “Take this footstool and rest at my side whilst I again wish you joy at the good fortune of entering

the household of Jezebel, the daughter of the great and powerful high priest of Baal."

"Alas, lady," replied the young Israelite, not raising his eyes from the ground, "all joy is passed from me for ever. To the captive in a far-off land death is preferable to the gilded cage of the prisoner."

"Not so, not so!" she responded, hastily. "We Syrians are kind to our servants, and their yoke is slightly felt; but tell me your name and calling, and how you fell prisoner to our bands."

"I am Azalim, the Tishbite, a herdsman of Gilead, lady, the adopted son of a holy prophet of the Lord God of Israel. I was tending the herds of my master Phaniel when the Syrian band came upon us, sudden as the lightning from the summer cloud, and we were overcome, taken, and —"

"Overcome and taken to be brought into the service of the first lady in Damascus," interrupted Jezebel. "The gods have been good to thee, young Hebrew. Thou shalt never regret the hour of capture which has brought thee to Ethbaal's daughter. I will have no man around me who is not comely in person, and thou wilt outstrip them all in my favour."

Jezebel looked at Azalim sharply, expecting to see him in a confusion of gratified vanity at receiv-

ing such overt flattery from so great and beautiful a woman, but he was too despairing of heart to be accessible on the side of his personal vanity; for the present, moreover, his mind was filled with the image of another woman, so that neither the Syrian's undeniable beauty nor her position as his future owner affected him.

Surprised at this indifference, to which she was little accustomed, and perhaps to hide her pique, she said :

“ As thou art now rested and refreshed from thy travel, I will myself conduct thee to the place and explain the services I require of thee.”

She waved back her Nubians, signed Azalim to her side, and led him to a court where many peacocks strutted, spreading and trailing their gorgeous feather-trains; then to a small grove where apes chattered and gibbered; to a stable where a white ass, of unusual size and great beauty, and a camel were evidently most carefully tended. Then she spoke.

“ To thy care, Israelite, I commit these creatures, and now I will show thee the most valued by me of them all. One whom at *present*” — she paused and looked at him expressively — “ I love better than any living being, and who loves me more than

all my would-be lovers, for he loves me only and hates all else. Moloch, my dog — !”

“Dog!” interrupted Azalim, in a tone of such intense scorn and aversion as to cause Jezebel to look at him with displeasure. Perhaps there is no greater contrast between three thousand years ago and the present than in the attitude of its two humanities toward the dog. Then no insulting name in any Eastern tongue could be found of such offensive and degrading meaning as *dog*! No thing endowed with life was so neglected, ill-used, and despised. The dog was given a bad name, and, as a consequence, deserved it. All his natural vices flourished, all his fine qualities were in abeyance. Treacherous, servile, the mean qualities of what we term a cur were his. The dog prowled at large, the Ishmael of creation, as repulsive in appearance as he was dangerous in temper. But, in these days, careful training and generous treatment have changed his vices into virtues, his treachery to fidelity, his servility to obedience, his meannesses to sagacity and unerring instinct. Moreover, he possesses an intuitive understanding of and sympathy with his master which justifies his present title of “The friend of man.”

“Yes, ‘dog,’” the priest’s daughter repeated. “A dog who followed me as a whelp, and will let none

touch him but myself. It will be thy duty, Israelite, to run with him beside my camel or white ass when I go abroad, and I warn thee to keep the chain tight to his head, or woe to thy throat or limbs!"

What Azalim thought of this service he had no time to express, for they now stood before the kennel in which Jezebel's favourite, securely chained, lay mangling the body of a dead lamb, for Moloch preferred killing his own meat, and refused all other food. Even when lying down he appeared a monstrous creature, far more like a wolf than even the miserable scavengers of the city. His coarse black hair was scanty here and tufted there on his lean, gaunt hide. The head was long and pointed, and the blood of the lamb was dropping from his jaws, and might have been also in his evil eyes, they were so heavily bloodshot. Jezebel went fearlessly up to this creature and laid her hand caressingly on its head.

"Good Moloch, beloved Moloch!" she said, in her softest voice, — and it could be very soft when she pleased, — "thou pride of the great priest's daughter, rise up and show thyself to this goodly Hebrew captive, who has become servant to thy mistress and shall be as a slave to thyself."

But Moloch did not rise. He eyed Azalim with

no friendly glance, and drew up his lip from over his teeth.

“Rise up, Moloch. Rise, beloved of thy mistress!” repeated Jezebel, in a still softer, sweeter tone, but the sullen brute did not move a muscle.

Now Azalim, who was a past master in exacting obedience from the lower animals, lost patience at this scene. He snatched up a small whip from the ground, with which the servants of the priest’s daughter chastised Moloch, — when he was securely chained, — and with it inflicted a sharp stroke on Moloch’s back, accompanied with a vigorous kick in his ribs, and exclaimed, in a voice of stern, quick authority, “Rise up, thou scum of Gehenna! Arise, thee!”

Moloch had never before heard a word of Hebrew; yet, with a dog’s intuitive instinct, he evidently understood the command, and dared not disobey it, for, with something between a growl and a whine, he instantly rose to his feet.

The angry blood that rose to Jezebel’s cheek flushed through her paint. Her servant had ventured to interfere, and her dog had obeyed him when he had disobeyed her.

“How darest thou, a captive and a slave, act like a lord in the presence of thy mistress?” she cried.

Azalim had had but little experience of women.

His intercourse with them had been restricted to the affection of his sister Salome, the love of Zillah, and the acquaintance of the maidens and matrons of his vicinity. The only feminine authority he had ever known was the gentle sway of Phaniel's wife, his future mother-in-law, and he was by no means inclined to submit to this Syrian damsel, who, after all, was younger than himself.

"She is no older than Zillah and the maidens of the wells," he said to himself. "What right has she —" And then he looked at her and remembered that, as he was a captive and she his owner, perforce he must bend his will to hers, and he said, humbly:

"Pardon thy slave, O daughter of the great priest. I did not mean to meddle."

But Jezebel would not be conciliated; she could neither forget nor forgive that the offender had succeeded with Moloch when she failed, and she said, tauntingly:

"Had the dog not been chained thou hadst not dared thus to treat him, thou man of Israel."

"Unchain him, then," cried Azalim, with a careless defiance in his tone; but, as he spoke, he put himself into a position of defence, and watched Moloch with a wary eye.

Jezebel ordered one of the servants who had

followed the party to unchain the dog, which instantly leapt at the throat of the Hebrew captive, but Azalim, well on his guard, as rapidly seized with one hand the metal ring around the brute's neck, to which the chain was fastened, and, throwing down the whip he held in the other, grasped the throat of Moloch until his eyes started from his head in strangulation. But it was no easy task to hold him. Tall and strong as Azalim was, the great dog stretched above his shoulder. Jezebel, alarmed for them both, called to her servants to help the herdsman, and they rechaind the creature with so short a tether as to render his rage harmless. Azalim, regardless of Jezebel's entreaties and threats, picked up the whip and administered a chastisement to Moloch which soon reduced him to abject quietude.

Then, turning to Jezebel, he said, bowing almost to the ground as he spoke: "Thy slave craves thy pardon, daughter of Ethbaal, when he counsels thee to exact fear, not love, in thy treatment of this child of Beelzebub. Hold out thy hand, I pray thee, and I will hold out my foot, and thou shalt see upon whom the favour of this spawn of Gehenna will fall."

"I do not believe thee," retorted Jezebel, angrily.

“There is no living being Moloch would prefer to me.”

Nevertheless, she held out the hand accustomed to caress her favourite fearlessly near his mouth, and Azalim placed his bare foot a little behind it. Servants and slaves in Syria were not allowed shoes or sandals. Without a moment's hesitation the dog turned his head away from the hand of the woman that had fondled him, and licked with effusive demonstration the naked foot of the man who had thrashed and kicked him.

Azalim withdrew his foot with a gesture of repulsion, and dipped it into a marble basin where a small fountain played. Then, wiping the dripping member on the verdant grass around the fountain, he turned to Jezebel.

“Lady,” he said, “thy dog has fawned on the foot that kicked it. Beware, lest some day he bites the hand that fed it.”

Before Jezebel could reply to this bold speech, the steward Gehanan appeared, and, making a low obeisance before Jezebel, addressed her in a voice and manner of the deepest grief.

“Daughter of Ethbaal, thy servant casts dust on his head and covers his face in trouble, that he has been unable to buy this Hebrew slave for thee. The merchant either deceived me or was himself

deceived, for he finds that he sold this Israelite to the service of the gods before I purchased him on thy behalf."

Jezebel, though outwitted, did not believe a word of the steward's tale, but was powerless to help herself. If a prisoner of war were dedicated to the service of the gods, none dared even *offer* to buy him. Anger and disappointment flamed in her face, but she subdued them as best she could. "When is he to be sent, and where?" she inquired.

"At once, and to the house of Rimmon," returned the steward.

Jezebel turned to the young herdsman. "The gods claim thee," she exclaimed, "and I dare not interfere. Yet take courage. I shall often worship in the house of Rimmon, and will use all my influence to promote thy interests. Till we meet again may Baal shine upon thee. Thou bright and beautiful star of the morning," she muttered to herself.

Azalim was hurried away to be a doorkeeper in the house of Rimmon. What mattered to him whether he served a rich priest's daughter or in the heathen temple? He was a prisoner for life in a strange country, and, with the passionate love of kin and the promised land which distinguished the Hebrews, Azalim rejected all thought of hope, and, sinking down on the door-step of Rimmon, he

groaned: "Ah, Gilead, is there no balm, no physician there for me? Zillah, my promised bride! Wilt thou never call me husband? Elijah, my lord, Elijah, thou prophet of the most High, hath thy God revealed to thee the misery of thy adopted son, and will he be entreated by thee for me? Elijah, Elijah!" and with this name upon his lips Azalim sank in the wretchedness of despair upon the floor of the idol's house, and, at last, in a merciful unconsciousness, passed the long hours of the first night of his captivity.

CHAPTER III.

ELIJAH

IN one of the most fertile valleys of the mountainous land of Gilead dwelt Ephraim the Tishbite, a man of wealth, with many flocks and herds, covering the sunny slopes of the inheritance of his fathers. He had silver and gold also, and was much honoured by his people, sitting high in the seat of the elders, *but* — he had no child.

This deprivation, which in our crowded over-peopled days is often borne with acquiescence, sometimes even with relief, was judged the direst misfortune, almost a reproach, three thousand years ago, especially among the children of Israel, where each woman hoped she might become the mother of the Messiah, and every man felt his life would be almost worthless unless as a father he perpetuated his name in the succeeding generations.

Ephraim and Hannah, his wife, feared the Lord, and had never joined in the symbolic idolatry of the golden calf. Doubtless they had, in the earlier days

of their marriage, supplicated for the blessing of children, but as the years since their wedding-feast passed by, and their prayers were unanswered, they gave up all hope of offspring, and bowed themselves to the will of Jehovah, when, lo! kinsfolk and friends were summoned to rejoice with the hitherto childless couple, for behold, Hannah had borne a son to her husband.

The land rang with the fame of the rejoicings at the circumcision of the child, and the parents expressed their intensity of thankfulness by calling him after the name of the great Giver, — Elijah, — which signified, in reverent interpretation, God — Jehovah.

Time passed, and the child grew strangely unlike other children. He was a moody, apparently sullen boy, self-willed even to fierceness, restive under the least contradiction, and seemingly not to be won by kindness. His parents, who had resisted the adoration of Jeroboam's calf, now set up this idol in their hearts, and worshipped the God-sent gift they had so passionately desired.

The decree went forth that the child, then the lad, then the youth, was never to be thwarted in his wishes or contradicted in his will. With the intense unselfishness of weak maternity, Hannah fostered his failings and pandered to his wild impulses, and

Ephraim too willingly seconded her folly. Born with the same passions as his fellows, their uncontrolled indulgence developed into acts of violence, which long ere he reached manhood made him a terror to all around.

About this time his mother died, but, as Hannah had long since ceased to be necessary to Elijah's comfort or interests, her death caused him little if any grief. Released from her influence, however, Ephraim's eyes became opened to the mistakes of their parental rearing, and he endeavoured to regain his authority and control his son, but soon perceived the hopelessness of the task he had undertaken, and gave it up.

Then the father offered to procure a wife for his son, but the latter roughly answered that when he wanted a wife he would choose one for himself. Ephraim observed, however, with satisfaction, that Elijah often lingered at a little distance from the wells where the maidens drew water or watered their flocks.

He looked little likely to attract a maiden's eye, this rough, rugged young man, with hair on cheek and lip like the mane of a young lion, an overhanging, sullen brow, and an almost ferocious look and manner, yet the maidens of three thousand years ago were very much like those of the twentieth

century, and the only son of the rich Ephraim the Tishbite was an object of great interest to the young womanhood of Gilead, who shot many a beck and nod and wreathed smile from their feminine armoury at Elijah. But either from shyness or indifference he did not respond to their advances, and they called him a bear in a lion's skin, and vented their disappointment in many other angry comparisons.

There was one among them who took a deeper interest in the son of Ephraim than her jesting companions. Knowing the misfortune which his rearing had been, she felt a deep pity for him. Once on the hills a wolf had attacked her sheep as she was driving them at eve to their fold, and Elijah heard her cries and shot the wolf with an arrow from his bow; another time, when he was at the well where she was drawing water, she had slung her pitcher from her shoulder and offered it to him, with the usual salutation, "Drink, my lord," but they had no more conversation for some time afterward.

It happened, however, that something had taken place in his father's house which had greatly displeased Elijah, and, whether rightly or wrongly, he had cast the blame upon Reuben, who had been a trusty servant to Ephraim before Elijah's birth;

he had been like a second father to the child, had carried him in his arms, tended him in sickness, and loved him with the tenderness of a mother. In a paroxysm of uncontrolled passion, Elijah had struck the old man so severely that he had fallen sick unto death, more, it was thought, of grief at the ingratitude of his young master than from the effects of the blow, although that had been heavy. Salome heard of this. She watched her opportunity, and, when she met Elijah, she said, "Elijah, knowest thou that the angel of death is busy with Reuben, and that if he dies thou wilt be his murderer?"

The youth did not answer her, but a sullen frown gathered on his brow. He was not used to such plain speaking.

"Wouldst thou have thy brother's blood cry from the ground against thee?" said Salome, waxing warm at his evident indifference.

"I am not Reuben's keeper," replied Elijah, morosely.

"Thou speakest the words of Cain," was Salome's indignant comment. "Darest thou, Elijah, brave the wrath of Jehovah and his mark upon thy forehead?"

A further lowering of the brow, an angry flash of the eye, and Elijah turned moodily away from her.

Salome felt she had failed, and had a painful consciousness that a strange fire had mixed with her zeal, and that in her heat she had spoken unadvisedly. It was not too late to retrieve her error. Elijah was walking slowly away. She overtook him and gently laid her hand upon his arm.

He stopped and turned around. A strange thrill passed through him at the contact of that light pressure, a quicker flow of his life-blood through the veins, as if a new yet separate life had entered into them. "Elijah," she almost whispered, as gently as the sigh of the summer breeze, "wilt thou not go to this old man who has loved thee from thy birth, and speak the kind words which shall give life back to him?"

The accusing words of Salome could not stir this man so rugged and so hard, but the slight loving touch, the gentle speech, melted him, as the sun in his strength thaws the ice over the frozen river. He did not speak, only looked at her, and, as their eyes met, Salome knew that she had not again failed.

She slipped her hand within his, and thus they walked in silent clasp to the door of Reuben's sick-chamber, and there Salome left him.

The next day Elijah said to his father, "Get me Salome, the kinswoman of Asher, to wife," and,

overjoyed at the proposal, Ephraim at once fulfilled the request.

Salome had neither father nor mother, and, with a little brother many years younger than herself, was dependent upon her father's brother for maintenance. Dependency is not a happy lot and is rarely improving to the character, but Salome's nature was of so fine and firm a fibre as to resist the deteriorating influence of adverse circumstances, and she grew as lovely in disposition as in person. Her young brother, Azalim, supplied her heart with love and gave an object to her life. With her rare beauty, marriage was a certainty in the future, but Salome had dreaded the tie which would be, after the custom, a mere barter of her youth and fair comeliness, until Elijah came across her path.

The wedding-feast might have graced a royal marriage, and, when Elijah took his bride and young Azalim to his father's house, Ephraim blessed the day that his daughter-in-law came to him. The old man did not long enjoy his happiness. Before three months had gone by he was gathered to his fathers, and Elijah his son reigned in his stead.

The granite rock of Elijah's nature had, as it were, been cloven asunder by the softening influence of Salome, and Elijah became as honoured in Israel as he had hitherto been disliked and despised. The

couple dwelt among their own people, fearing the Lord and abjuring the idolatry of the golden calves, and all went well with them until the year of their marriage was drawing to a close.

One day it happened that Elijah started at earliest dawn on a necessary journey, and Salome stood at the door to see him depart. He looked around as he was mounting his ass to see his wife's face pale with emotion and tears falling from her eyes. He came back, embraced her tenderly, and asked why she wept.

"The Lord God of thy fathers bless and keep thee from henceforth," she answered, solemnly. "Elijah, thou and I will never meet again in life."

"Then I will not leave thee now, beloved," he said. "There is no need."

"Nay, but thou must depart," she answered, sadly. "Our parting will not be averted by thy presence. A spirit of prophecy has come upon me, my husband, which tells me that it is the will of Jehovah we should part, because the rending asunder of our lives will give thee a high place in his service."

"Salome, desire of my eyes and beloved of my soul, speak not thus," returned Elijah, in a tone of deep distress. "Surely Jehovah would have revealed such important events to the strong husband

instead of to so frail a flower as thou art. 'Tis a question of thy present health's weakness, not of prophecy; I will not leave thee."

"It may be so," she assented, "and thou must not delay thy business for my foolish fears. By evening thou wilt be back again, husband of my love, and we can mock together at my evil dream." Elijah set forth reluctantly, for a weight of evil presentiment had likewise fallen upon himself, but, strange as it may seem, Salome urged his departure.

The long day wore away. Elijah completed the affairs in hand and turned towards home with all speed, for an anxious misgiving was working within him. He reached the brow of the hill which overlooked his house. "O God of my fathers," he cried, "what is this?"

Smoke was issuing from the doors and windows of his home; the solid stone walls had withstood the fire, but the slighter outbuildings around smouldered in ruins, and he saw the signs of robbery, destruction, and flight all around. No need of an explanation. The Syrian bands had made a raid upon Israel, and his home was a part of their spoil.

The ass he rode was as strong and swift as a horse. He made it fly rather than gallop down the slope, flung himself from the saddle, and there, on the ground in the garden, Salome lay lifeless with

a wound in her breast from which the blood had ceased to flow. Elijah rent his garment, cast dust upon his head, and uttered a loud and exceedingly bitter cry.

When the days of the mourning for his wife were finished, Elijah appointed a steward to administer his affairs, collected the silver and gold left by his father, and gathered together a company of fighting men to avenge his wrongs on the Syrians. So effectually did he carry out his purpose that his bands became the terror of the enemy's frontier, but at last the King of Syria sent so strong a force against him that his men were either slain or scattered, and Elijah himself was taken prisoner and thrown into a dungeon.

He escaped from imprisonment and went to Samaria, where, at the time, all was confusion in the government of Israel, the throne being at the mercy of a succession of usurpers. Here he obtained much distinction, and in the disordered state of affairs he might have succeeded in becoming a temporary king himself, had not all his efforts been devoted to bringing about a war against Syria. At last he obtained from the present king a proposal for a league with the neighbouring rulers against Syria, and departed with an escort to carry out the negotiations. On the road they encountered a terrific storm

of thunder and lightning, and the man next in authority to Elijah was struck dead. When preparing him for burial a document was found concealed on his breast disclosing secret instructions to the King of Syria to waylay and seize Elijah. The discovery of this treachery was a terrible blow to Elijah, who at once gave up all further communication with the King of Israel. Leaving his escort, he set out alone for a friend's house.

On the last night of his journey, overtaken by fatigue, he lay down to rest and fell asleep. The moon's baleful beams fell full upon his face, and when he awoke it was into outer darkness, for he had been smitten with blindness. He was found, recognized, and taken to the house of his nearest kinsman, Phanuel, where he remained carefully tended until his restoration.

His first act on his recovery was to present the young lad Azalim, his wife's brother, to Phanuel, and say, "Kinsman, thou art the next of kin to the inheritance of my fathers. Had Salome lived to give me a son he would in turn have possessed it. But now no wife will call me husband, no child will belong to me. Therefore I charge thee that this youth Azalim, the brother of my Salome, take the place of her child by sharing with thy own children the inheritance to which thou wilt succeed.

Treat him as my adopted son. Let him not live in idleness, but entrust him with thy flocks and herds, for which he is apt, and be to him as a second father. Swear, now, by the God of Israel, that thou wilt fulfil this, my request, and the Lord do so to thee and more also if thou fail in thy oath."

It is needless to add that Phaniel took the oath, and pleasant to record that he kept it in the letter and the spirit. Azalim was regarded as his son, and when he was taken captive, it was, as we know, on the eve of his marriage with Zillah, Phaniel's daughter, and the captured cattle were his wedding-gift.

The next act of Elijah was to establish Phaniel as the present occupant and future heir of his land, his cattle and his substance, and having thus settled his affairs of earth, he joined the schools of the prophets, and enrolled himself to be henceforth a servant of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON

THERE was but one temple in Syria, — that of Baalbec, the mighty immensity dedicated to Baal, the supreme sun-god; all the other places of worship were called houses.

The gods of the heathen were not jealous gods. They were quite willing to share their honours with other deities. The house of Rimmon, to which Azalim was appointed, was the most liberal, in this respect, in Damascus. It was, in fact, a Pantheon of the gods, containing altars dedicated to all the most popular Syrian divinities, whose priests assisted in the prayers and received the offerings of the devotees. It was also the house most favoured by the king and his court, and where royalty goes loyalty is sure to follow. The house of Rimmon was consequently the resort of the great and rich people of Damascus, who, as if by general consent, converted it into a crowded place of favourite resort.

Ethbaal's daughter, true to the god of her father,

had seldom visited the house of Rimmon, but after the young Hebrew captive became attached to its service, a change came over this indifference. She had been attracted by his uncommon comeliness in the slave-market, captivated by his display of strength and skill with the bull, and his value had been further increased in her eyes by the disappointment in securing him for her household, and his cold lack of appreciation of her beauty and position. She could not banish his image from her thoughts, and it troubled her to discover that she never before had been moved like this by her many would-be adorers among the youth of Damascus.

We must not measure this love of Jezebel by our own code of unwritten social laws. In modern civilization the inclination of the daughter of the greatest man in her country for a herdsman of the wilds would be a *mésalliance* almost as impossible as it would be judged disgraceful. But other times, other manners. There was no sliding social scale in the East three thousand years ago between the millionaire and the beggar, the aristocrat and the plebeian.

After a few days of sullen despair Azalim almost unconsciously began to regain, if not hope, at least a measure of resignation akin to cheerfulness. Given youth and health and the necessities of life, it is not

natural to continue altogether moody and disconsolate, especially when one's surroundings are full of excitement and interest. Azalim had for companion slaves captives like himself; he was well fed and clothed, and the house of Rimmon was always more or less full of devotees, generally the richest and gayest of the population, and the forms of worship were as varied and entertaining as the scenes in a theatre. Before long he became almost reconciled to the situation, and the hills and mountains of Gilead and the people and events of his past life gradually became half forgotten.

But one image was never laid aside, one thought was ever with him. Zillah, the love of his youth, who should have been the bride of his manhood, the wife, as he had hoped, of his old age, was ever before his eyes, filling his heart so completely that there was not one spare space in which the snares and blandishments of Jezebel could find footing.

The daughter of Ethbaal became a constant attendant at the house of Rimmon. The eunuch's watchful eye noticed this new phase of devotion, and readily divined its cause, but he dared not interfere with the worship of the gods, and only ventured to arrange that his young mistress should always be fully attended. Jezebel, therefore, appeared with her Nubians waving their fans, two or three of her

maidens behind, and the same number of Gehanan's eunuchs bringing up the rear, whilst their mistress, painted, jewelled, and attired in her richest stuffs, paraded the house of Rimmon. It was not from fear of a mésalliance that Gehanan guarded Jezebel so watchfully, for the herdsman of to-day might be the man whom the king delighted to honour to-morrow, but for the reason that Ethbaal had other views for his daughter.

It was a rule in this place for no worshipper to approach the altar alone, but to advance in couples, the one leaning on the arm of the other, and it was not unusual to select one of the doorkeepers for this duality, therefore no exception was taken to Jezebel's choice of the young Israelite, for whom as well as for herself she laid offerings on Rimmon's high altar, whilst the priests hastily gabbled the prayers of acceptance and reward. Then in great state, followed by her train, she would make the circuit of the altars with Azalim by her side, genuflecting at every shrine and giving an ejaculation of praise to each. Azalim refused even to bend to the idols, and his devout and amorous companion was careful not to notice the omission. The young Hebrew was rallied by his fellow slaves about the fair maiden's favour. He admitted her beauty and acknowledged the honour

accorded him, but plainly showed that the subject was distasteful, and it was soon dropped.

By no means baffled by this persistent coldness, Jezebel changed her tactics. For some years, almost from her childhood, Ethbaal's daughter had longed to study witchcraft. To hold intercourse with the powers of darkness, to commune with a familiar spirit ever at her call, and ready with his counsel, had been the highest dream of her ambition, but all attempts in that direction had been sternly repressed by the high priest. No man knew better than he the secrets of the awful brotherhood, and he resolved that the daughter of the woman he had so deeply loved and long lamented should be kept clear of its deadly influence. Nevertheless, Jezebel determined that if ever she were her own mistress the demons of the occult world should be her real gods.

The spiritualism of the present day — that is, the belief that the world of spirits can hold communication with humanity through the medium of the senses — was an indisputable fact three thousand years ago, and the witch and the wizard exercised the black art with all the subtlety of a magic taught them by an intelligence infinitely higher than their own.

“All comes to those who wait,” and Jezebel eagerly seized the opportunity of communicating

with a witch, by procuring a love philtre to soften the obdurate heart of the young Hebrew, for slighted vanity had increased the spark of her passing fancy into a flame of passionate love.

The witch of the highest reputation in Damascus was attached to the house of Baal, and hither Jezebel sent one of her maidens for the draught.

The service of the gods was not a hard one, and the slaves were allowed the noonday rest which is so grateful a necessity in hot climates. Each one wore a bracelet and anklet attached to a chain fixed in the wall when he lay down on the mat prepared for him, and meat, water, cooling drinks, or even wine if preferred, were placed within his reach.

Azalim had been powerless to prevent the shearing of his Nazarite locks, but he had resolutely kept his vow of abstinence from wine or strong drink, and only water was provided for him; into this the attendant was bribed to cast and dissolve the tasteless powder which was to inspire love for Ethbaal's daughter in the cold heart of the Israelite.

There was no mishap in the matter. The day was hot and Azalim thirsty, and to the last drop he drained the cool liquid.

Full of excitement and hope, Jezebel attended one of the earliest services at the house of Rimmon, and summoned the captive slave to support her devo-

tions, but, to her anger and surprise, he preserved the same cool self-command and the like respectful indifference in his demeanour toward her as before.

In an access of rage she returned home, and in her wrath actually took out her little jade image which assisted her prayers, and reproached and struck it. Then swathed and veiled beyond recognition she directed her camel-driver to take her to the house of Baal.

The worship of the gods was above ground. The brother rites of the demons were below. Jezebel, with a slight flutter at her heart, presented herself at the portico of the spirits, paid her entrance, and descended the stairs.

Through dark passages and under heavy arches she followed her guide, and then she was left alone in an enclosure lighted only by a dim lamp shaped like a star, where she awaited an audience with the best patience at her command.

She was brave to foolhardiness, this strange young woman, yet she had a woman's thin nerves and more or less sensitive nature, and she soon became conscious of a lazy stir and slow movement around which gave her a creeping, crawling sensation. As her sight grew accustomed to the gloom, she perceived in a corner a gaunt scavenger mother-dog of huge size, suckling a litter of ill-formed pups, and

from a basket almost at her feet a snake raised its head from the coils, gave a feeble hiss, and relapsed again upon them. A huge toad, bloated and spotted, crept under the swathings of her attire as it fed beside her stool, and unclean, loathsome creatures crawled upon the walls and hung from the ceilings.

Jezebel was summoning all her self-control to suppress a scream when a woman entered, turned up the lamp, thus lending more distinctness to the place, and inquired the business of the visitor. The newcomer, although nearly a decade older than Jezebel, was still young, some seven and twenty perhaps, and, while not to be compared to the priest's daughter in beauty, was by no means deficient in personal gifts.

"Thou art not Neroa," observed Jezebel, who knew that the renowned witch was old and of a far different appearance, "and my business is with her."

"I am her daughter, Neroa the younger, and belong like my mother to the brotherhood of the spirits. I act for her in all but the most important matters. If thou wilt tell me thy business, I can then judge if it is out of my sphere."

Jezebel with much warmth explained the failure of the philtre.

"Will it please thee, lady, to give me thy name and that of thy desired lover," demanded the young

maiden, courteously. Jezebel hesitated. It would be dangerous for her father to discover her action.

"It does not matter, I need not trouble thee," observed the other, carelessly. "Lulu!" she continued, sharply, and at the call a sleek leopard-like creature, black as jet and at least twice the size of our largest domestic cats, who had followed the young witch unobserved by Jezebel, leapt forward, and as its mistress seated herself at a table, sprang upon it, and placing his head close to hers began rubbing and fondling her after the manner of feline creatures coaxing for food. It seemed to the spectator only a few moments before the young witch rose, ordered the great cat down and calmly remarked:

"Daughter of Ethbaal, if thou hadst been wise enough to tell us thy real name and that of thy friend when thou didst send for the philtre of love, thou wouldst not have lost thy money nor wouldst the draught have failed in potency. His heart is filled with another image, and on such our charms have no power."

"Witch," cried the astonished visitor, "how camest thou to know all this in a moment of time?"

"I have entered as servant the brotherhood of the spirits," replied the witch, "and this," pointing to the leopard, "is my familiar."

Jezebel put her hand under her swathings and drew from her arm a gemmed bracelet which she held up before the witch, whose eyes glistened at its beauty.

"I will give thee this," said Jezebel, "if thou wilt tell me the name of the woman who stands in my way, and many another jewel of silver and gold if thou wilt teach me how to supplant her, or better still," she added, "name thy price and I will give it to thee for the loan of thy familiar for a single week."

"The latter desire of thine, daughter of Ethbaal, is impossible. The demon spirits are not transferable, nor do they always work human desire at human will, but give me that jewel and I will counsel thee. Promise thy hoped-for lover his freedom. Draw him out to tell thee why he longs for it, and if the name of his beloved is revealed in his confidence, come again to me, and now," holding out her hand for the ornament as she spoke, "depart in peace."

That very evening there was a grand function in the house of Rimmon, and under cover of the ceremonies, Jezebel, pretending fatigue, requested as before the company and protection of Azalim in the portico until her camel and servants arrived.

"I am glad for this occasion to tell thee, O son of Israel," she said, "that my influence with the

priests of Rimmon and the captain who sold thee is so great that I am likely to obtain thy liberty, and before long thou mayest look forward to returning to Gilead."

Azalim sprang from the ground with a great cry of joy, and then falling at Jezebel's feet he kissed the hem of her garment, exclaiming, "May the Lord God of Israel bless thee now and for evermore for this thy kindness to the slave and the stranger."

"Is thy heart so bound up in the land of thy fathers?" inquired she.

"Yes, lady, the land of our birth is the land of our life, and to me it is even more. It is the country of my own people, of my guide and adopted father, — a great prophet of Jehovah. It is the Gilead where I was to own pasturage and flocks and herds, and be a prince and elder of my race, and, above all, it is the land of Zillah, my love, my promised bride who is waiting and sorrowing for my return, and of whom I think with my first waking thoughts at morn and dream of at night."

The face of Jezebel darkened in an evil expression not good to see at this rhapsody, but she turned it away and managed to say, indifferently, "I hope she is worthy of thy love; I suppose she is at least beautiful."

"There is not a maiden in Syria that could hold

a torch to her loveliness," answered the infatuated and imprudent young man. "Nay, she is the fairest blossom that has ever budded on either side of the Jordan and —"

Jezebel laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh and it arrested his attention and stopped any further flowery speech, but her face was turned away, and she rose and said: "Well, Israelite, I will see what can be done to restore thee to this wonderful love of thine, but now go and see if my people are arriving, for I am somewhat ill and shall be better at home."

The next day Jezebel visited the young witch, Neroa's daughter, and the following scheme was the result of the conference.

A diligent search was set on foot among the Israelite captives of the Syrian raids for some one from the neighbourhood of Azalim's home; and it was not long before they succeeded in finding a tool fit for their purpose. With promises of freedom and present gifts of money, they obtained all the information they required of his former life and connections to concoct a story which the young man agreed to relate as truth to his compatriot, and for which purpose he was entered as a door-keeper in the house of Rimmon.

When Azalim saw Issachar, with whom he had

been acquainted in Gilead, installed as a fellow slave in the idol's house, his joy was great. He rushed forward, embraced the newcomer, and cried, "Blessed be thou who comest as a gift from the Lord, oh, my friend; as water springs in the desert, as the shadow of a great rock in a shadeless land, is the sight of thee to my eyes, thy voice to my ears."

In his outward confusion and inward shame Issachar responded but coldly to this effusive reception by his friend.

"And now," continued the latter, regaining his self-control, "tell me the tidings of Gilead. Is Phanuel, the old man, well; and who now guides the herds on the hills and valleys?"

"Phanuel is well," returned the other, "and his servants manage the cattle as best they can."

"Hast thou no tidings to tell me of our people and — and — of Zillah — is she well? Speak, Issachar, thou knowest she was to be my bride. Doth she not grieve for me?"

"There is but little new to tell," said Issachar, evasively. "A few of the young are married, some of the old have died, and the Syrian bands have ravaged our houses and killed our children as usual, and —"

"I questioned of Zillah," interrupted Azalim, impatiently. "Is she well?"

"She is well."

"And — and — happy? I mean not too unhappy?"

"She *is* happy," replied Issachar, shortly.

Azalim started as if he had been struck.

"Happy," he repeated, "happy? What canst thou mean?"

"Son of Israel," exclaimed Issachar, who now felt repentant of the task he had undertaken, seeing as he did its effect on his friend, "what the ear doth not hear and the eye doth not see, the heart doth not sorrow for. Ask no further questions about Zillah, is my counsel as thy friend."

"But I will ask, and I adjure thee in the name of the God of Abraham to tell me the truth."

"If thou wilt, thou must!" retorted Issachar. "Hear then, Zillah is the wife of another man."

"Thou liest, thou son of Belial," cried Azalim in a paroxysm of rage.

"Wait a space and I will bring another to confirm the words thou hast forced me to speak," said Issachar, who left the house of the gods as he spoke, and going into the street, fetched a witness ready prepared for the occasion.

This was an old Ishmaelite, a peddler, who trav-

ersed the country of Syria and Gilead with goods. Azalim knew him well by sight, as he sold trinkets and stuffs to the women of the villages near Phanuel's house. He confirmed the evil news told by Issachar, with the further particulars that when Phanuel had heard that his intended son-in-law was a prisoner in Damascus, he had given his daughter to old Isaac, the richest man, next to Phanuel, in that region of Gilead, who had long coveted the lovely daughter of the latter for his wife.

"Oh, Zillah, my beloved," moaned Azalim, "and thou hast been thus cruelly sacrificed."

"Nay, she was a willing bride," said the old peddler. "She wept thy absence at first, O Gileadite, but when she found thou wouldst never return, she felt it a duty to obey her father and become, as it is meet, a wife and mother in Israel."

Azalim could no longer doubt. He could have no reason to suspect these men lied to him. They were in the portico of the house, and he leaned against one of its pillars as motionless and white as though he were cut out of the same marble.

"Do not grieve," said Issachar, gently, touching Azalim's shoulder. "Fair as Zillah is, she is not worth it. No woman is. Turn to another," and he pointed to the women who haunted the house.

Azalim shook his head. His heart was too full

for him to speak. He was too utterly crushed by this sudden blow to yet measure his suffering. Like Joseph, he sought where to weep, but unlike Joseph, he had no chamber of retreat. The slaves of Rimmon were never alone.

CHAPTER V.

FLIGHT

By the advice of the witch's daughter, Jezebel did not visit the house of Rimmon for several days. "Give him time to brood over his lost love until it changes to anger," she said, "and then offer sympathy and creep into his vacated heart."

Concealing his sore trouble and sorrow amongst the crowds from whom he naturally desired to hide his wound, the young herdsman brooded over his wrongs, and after awhile, as the witch predicted, grew irritated against Zillah herself. Then he longed for human sympathy, to give vent to his feelings and to receive comfort. What he desired was near at hand, for five or six days after he had been told of the marriage of his betrothed, Jezebel and her train descended from their camels at the portico of Rimmon.

In the sunken, sleepless eyes, and pallid skin of the young Israelite, the girl read the success of her plot, but she did not appear to notice him, and for the first time since he had entered the service of the

house she neither greeted him nor requested the assistance of his arm to the high altar, selecting instead one of her own eunuchs who walked behind the maidens.

Azalim, who had generally rather disliked this mark of favour, now noticed the omission with surprise, and stranger still, with a dart of disappointment at the seeming slight.

Jezebel hurried to Rimmon's altar, laid her offering, echoed the muttered prayer of the priest who received it, and returned to the portico, where the herdsman still lingered.

"Pah!" she cried to her maidens, "the scent of the stale incense has made me sick unto death. The judges should punish the Ishmaelites who sell such trash. Let us stay here in the fresh coolness until the camels come back. Bring me a pile of cushions," she added to her eunuchs, "from the nearest merchant."

There were stalls of merchandise for sale and hire close by the house of Rimmon.

She arranged herself comfortably, and her attendants sat on mats at a little distance; then she called to Azalim, as if observing him for the first time.

"Ah, Hebrew, I had forgotten till I just caught sight of thee, that I came to speak to thee of thy liberty. Before long thou shalt return to thy moun-

tains and valleys and see once more the fair land of Gilead."

But Azalim did not reply.

"Art thou not glad?" she went on in a caressing tone. "Dost thou not long to hear the lowing of thy cattle, the rush of their stampede, the wild confusion of heads and horns and hoofs? Will it give thee no pleasure to tame the wild ass, to track the wolf, and fight with the lion and the bear?"

"It would once have done so, lady."

"Once, what meanest thou? Ah, I understand, thou art sick. Thine eye is heavy and thy step slow. I will send my physician to thee, Israelite."

"I thank thee, daughter of Ethbaal, but I am not sick. I need no physician."

"Then why so indifferent to thy freedom? Why so changed since I first spoke of it to thee? Ah, I know, I forgot to arouse thee by mentioning thy real desire for release. Thy bride, the maiden Zillah, awaits thy coming from the prison of the stranger."

She had bade him bring a mat and sit at her feet, and he was listening indifferently if not impatiently to her talk, but at the name of Zillah he sprang to his feet and with something very like an oath between his teeth, rather roughly forbade her to utter the name.

"Why not?" she asked softly, with an innocent wonder in the gleam of her languishing eyes. "Is not a Syrian maiden good enough to speak the name of a Hebrew one?"

"Nay, it is not that," he cried passionately, "but she whom I loved so deeply is false to me, and I would never hear the sound of her name again."

"Oh, no, impossible," cried Jezebel, in a voice of gentle regret and surprise. "No one," she added, "no woman, I mean, could be false to thee, O son of Israel."

He looked up at her, for he had resumed his place on the mat. There were tears in her voice, he thought, and he half expected to see them in her eyes, not knowing in his simplicity that painted eyes are not apt to shed tears, and as he looked at her he was curiously struck with her beauty. It was not new to him, of course. He had observed, and in a way admired it often before, but now it had as much the charm of novelty as if he really had never seen it hitherto. He wondered at the beauty and abundance of her hair, the regal pose of her head and shoulders, the suppleness yet dignity of her form, and then remembering her wealth and the prominence of her father, he felt flattered that so great a lady should so graciously notice him. Why had he not seen all this before, he thought, as Jezebel arose

saying that her camels were waiting and she must go. "The gods be with thee, son of Israel," she said as she left the portico, "thy false bride was not worthy of thee."

"She is beautiful and bright like the stars of heaven," he muttered, "and my eyes were holden."

Azalim's heart had been caught in the rebound.

Jezebel, notwithstanding her rare bodily and mental development and Oriental precocity, was very young and knew little of the world beyond its gods and its idols. Azalim, with his twenty years, was her senior, and the younger witch, the daughter of the greater Neroa, although still young, was some years in advance of Ethbaal's daughter. Had Jezebel been left to herself, it is very doubtful if she would have succeeded with the Hebrew captive. It was true that he was touched by her sympathy and at last awakened to her beauty, but as yet it was but a cold appreciation, and if the enamoured maiden had followed her own impulses and made open love to the slave of Rimmon, the affection which still lingered in his heart for Zillah would have neutralized her advances.

But Neroa the younger taught her a more cunning method. "Men's appreciation of us," she said, "is measured by the estimate put upon us by their fellows. We must contrive that thy beauty is vaunted

in his hearing. We inspire in them that thing which they call love, far more easily by playing on their vanity, arousing their jealousy, exciting their interest, and flattering their self-love, than by displaying our own charms and exhibiting our own perfections. This treatment," she continued, "makes them think of us, and when they begin to think of a woman, she will be the conqueror in the contest."

Jezebel was far too quick of comprehension not to appreciate this advice, and too acute not to act upon it. She began to shower gifts and smiles upon the other doorkeepers and officers of the house of Rimmon, who, in return, naturally talked of and extolled the beauty and riches of the donor. Then she would pass over Azalim and choose the youngest and most comely of the attendants to lean upon as she approached the high altar, and often passed him by without even a nod of recognition. The result predicted by the younger witch was verified. Azalim, influenced by the laudation of the priest's daughter, jealous of the favour shown to others, and displeased at the neglect of himself, began to think a great deal about Jezebel and less and less of Zillah.

Unexpected and favouring circumstances assisted his final slide into the abyss. Some sacerdotal troubles at Baalbec caused Ethbaal to send for Gehanan, in whose sagacity the high priest reposed

much confidence. The great heathen chief had not a heretic, nonconformist, or freethinker in his spiritual domain, and yet he had trouble, for the sparks of trouble flew upward three thousand years ago as they do in our day.

Gehanan selected as guardian to supply his place one only inferior to himself in watchfulness. He left strict instructions that Jezebel was to be kept from any close intercourse with the young men of Damascus, and was never to attend the houses of the gods without a train of attendants, but he forgot or did not think it needful to mention Azalim, whom he considered safely and finally disposed of, and no longer a danger to be avoided.

No sooner had Gehanan left Damascus than Jezebel appealed to the younger witch to obtain the transfer of Azalim into her service. This was easily accomplished. As the pagan gods were not jealous, the priests followed their example, and there was no rivalry between the houses of Baal and Rimmon. The latter readily consented to sell their doorkeeper to Jezebel, a boon she dared not herself have asked, at the request of Neroa. The sub-steward knew of no objection to the arrangement, and paid the price without demur.

All obstacles being thus cleared away, it was not long before Azalim became as enamoured of Jeze-

bel as she had long been with him, and, receiving every encouragement from her, he boldly spoke his love, to which Jezebel warmly responded, and the two young lovers gave themselves up for awhile to all the raptures and repetitions of the old, old story.

"I love thee! I love thee!" began, ended, and epitomized the matter, and then Azalim, awaking as from a dream, bethought himself of the natural and practical conclusion of all this ecstasy, — marriage.

"My beloved, my star of the heavens, my flower of the valley, my antelope of the wilderness," he cried, in all the rhapsody of young new love. "Tell me when the wedding-feast shall be which shall complete the happiness that now fills our whole existence?"

"Our what?" exclaimed Jezebel, in a sudden consternation. "What dost thou mean?"

She had not thought of marriage. She knew that her father destined her for the wife of one of the merchant princes of Tyre, and the prospect pleased her. The stir and gaiety of that great mercantile city were more attractive than the duller inland one of Damascus, of whose pleasures, indeed, she knew but little, so to gain time for thought, she repeated, "What dost thou mean?"

“Mean?” cried Azalim. “Why, that thou must be my wife, thou fair light of Paradise. All my own! None other to approach or look at thee, save thine husband, never to separate until death calls one of us to follow him.”

Jezebel was aghast at this proposal so ecstatically propounded by her Hebrew lover. It did not accord with her heathen training, but she concealed her distaste, and replied, “Ah, bliss to be thy wife, my Azalim, but what about my father? A maiden can only wed as her father bestows her, and he has other views for me.”

“I have been thinking of this as well as thyself,” replied her lover; “thy father’s consent is a stumbling-block on thy side, and the laws and religion of my own people is as a wall between us on mine. But love like ours, my Jezebel, will evade the one and leap the other.”

“What obstacles can there be on thy side?” inquired Jezebel, surprised at this possibility.

“My laws and religion, whilst they forbid the love between man and woman save under the sanction of marriage, also prohibit us to wed Moabitish — I mean women of another race.”

“I see,” returned Jezebel, coldly. “Well, then, since there are such barriers between us, why not

give up the thought of marriage, and remain friends?"

"Friends!" cried Azalim, indignantly, "when I choose friends, they are from among men. Friendship is but a rope of sand as a tie between man and woman. Daughter of Ethbaal, I love thee with my whole soul, but as my love is bound up with my life, I will only win and wear thee with the rights of a husband which shall give thee to me for ever."

Jezebel saw he was in deadly earnest, and when a woman sees that in a man she recognizes her master. For some moments she hesitated whether it was in her power to give up the young Hebrew. She looked at him standing there in all his splendid beauty of form and stern resolve of purpose, and decided, "No, — it is impossible."

"What is to be done?" she answered, in voice half-helpless, half-incredulous.

"Wed in secret," he replied, "and throw ourselves upon the hope and chance of all coming right in the end."

"Ah," responded Jezebel, to whom underhand dealing was not without its charm. "Yes, — but — this could not be done in Damascus; in the first case we should be too well watched. In the second, we should be betrayed."

He did not answer. He thought for some minutes, and then he spoke. "I have a plan. We must escape for some days into the land of Israel, — my adopted father shall give thee to me to wife!"

"Who is he?" demanded Jezebel.

"He is a prophet of Jehovah risen high amongst his brethren. In the present state of Israel on this side of Jordan, without temple, without priesthood, the prophets are permitted to join our people in marriage, and, on rare occasions, offer sacrifices, and otherwise perform the offices of the consecrated priesthood. Yes, we will go to Gilead."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Jezebel.

"Give me thy consent, and it shall be possible," retorted Azalim.

She took no notice of this appeal, but put a question.

"Doth thy law allow more than one wife, thou son of Israel?"

"Yes," replied Azalim, reluctantly, "it does. But do not fear, beloved, I will never take another to vex thee."

"And when thy people get too many wives, or tire of them, what do they do with the poor creatures?" asked Jezebel, sarcastically. "Drown them? I suppose beheading, a man's punishment, would be too honourable for the women."

"No," was Azalim's indignant reply. "They give the wives a writing of divorcement, and they can then return to their own people."

"And may the wives give the husbands a writing of divorcement when they tire of them?" inquired Jezebel, with an innocent look and tone.

"Ah, no," said Azalim, hastily, "no, they cannot."

"That is unfair," remarked Jezebel, quietly.

"Well, thou seest the men make the laws, and so naturally —"

"Make them in their own favour," she interrupted, laughingly. "Well, if we had the same chance, we should do the same thing. But now leave me, thou love of my soul, and I will think over what thou hast said, and I will give thee an answer on the morrow."

"Do not let the thought of the writing of divorcement trouble thee, thou pearl of beauty," whispered the enamoured lover as he embraced her and passionately kissed her lips, "I shall never tire of thee."

"Perchance not," thought Jezebel, "but it is just possible that by and by I may tire of thee, thou comely Israelite."

Jezebel did not give the answer on the following day, but prevaricated, hoping he would yield to her hints of delay, but Azalim, who had a strong

substratum of will in his character, was resolute she should be his wife or nothing to him. He held aloof from his mistress, and she from him; then, finding she could not give him up, she did as women usually do when the master sex is thoroughly in earnest, — she submitted her will to his. Having then consented not only to become Azalim's wife, but to be united in the land of Israel by a prophet of Jehovah, Jezebel lost no time in taking steps to manage this by no means easy matter. She sought help from Neroa.

Too discreet to mention the word marriage, she gave the witch to understand that she and her lover wished to take a few days' journey into the country, so as to enjoy one another's society alone, an impossibility in her strictly guarded home. Secret love intrigues formed a large part of the trade of witchcraft, and a scheme was quickly devised, which delighted the youthful lovers, and was speedily carried into execution.

It was a custom among the Damascenes to make excursions into the lovely environs of the city, spend the hot hours of the day amongst the shady trees and by the cool fountains, and return in the evening. Jezebel proposed such a picnic, as we should call it, to the sub-eunuch in charge of the house, who readily agreed to the proposal, and, with a retinue

of maidens and servants, with himself and eunuchs for guards, they started for the day's pleasure.

At the height of their enjoyment came a "bolt from the blue." A band of mounted robbers swooped down like a flock of vultures upon the party, beat the eunuchs, tore the bracelets and jewels from the arms and necks of the women, maltreating their victims at the same time with violence and insult. In the midst of the confusion, their chief approached Jezebel, and, like another Lochinvar, with "a touch of her hand and a word in her ear," like the wind they were off together, their flight scarcely noticed amidst the tumult, shrieks, and struggles of the attack.

On flew the desert-born steed, bearing the two runaways on their flight. It is needless to say that this bold rider was Azalim, who had been sent away on some trifling business, and had secured in the horse-market the strongest and fleetest of the recent equine importations from Egypt.

On, on for a league or so, and then Azalim drew rein, and the two looked back to see if they were pursued, just as in the good old times of our respected forefathers, flying lovers looked out from their post-chaise to see if an irate parent were close after them in another. We have changed all that. Parental authority is now a worn-out legend, and

the unconsulted father patiently awaits the air message of their return, and blesses his disobedient children on their arrival.

On, on, with unmingled delight and intervals of breathless laughter in the momentary pauses, galloped the two delighted lovers. No girl eloping from a school, no nun without a vocation escaping from a convent, could have enjoyed an ecstasy equal to that of Jezebel. As yet unstained by crime, her whole soul filled with the love of a youthful woman going to her bridal comparatively innocent, beautiful, and beloved, she felt her entire being was so overcrowded with bliss that were more added she would be crushed by its weight.

And what of Azalim? His rapture was even stronger, fiercer, than was Jezebel's; and so they rode on, those two — with their twenty and seventeen years, and with all the glorious hopes and possibilities of the future before them.

They suffered no privation. Jezebel had money and gems concealed on her person, and Azalim had food in his saddle-bags. There was fruit for the plucking over the fences of the vineyards and orchards by the wayside, and what more they wanted was easily purchased at the villages on their route. So they fled on without a care save as to pursuit,

and without a thought but of their mutual love and coming happiness.

As quickly as possible after crossing the frontier between Syria and Israel, Azalim purchased a strong mule for Jezebel's use, in order to avoid the unusual appearance of the double mount, and they proceeded more leisurely across the country toward the Jordan, where they were informed their great master was at present in retirement at the schools of the prophets on the borders of the Jordan.

The place of Elijah's retreat was a cave on the side of a hill so thickly covered with trees as to hide the view of the neighbouring river. The two fugitives reached the vicinity just as the noontide sun fell hottest on the land. Directed by one of the sons of the prophets of the neighbouring school, they arrived at the spot, tethered their steeds, and rested in the shade during the heat of the day, for Azalim knew that at eventide Elijah took a rest from his vigils and communion of prayer, and was ready to receive those who came to inquire at his word.

Jezebel was swathed and veiled, as was the usage of the Damascene women when they took their journeys into the country, but, after this rough ride, her attire was necessarily disarranged, and she retired beside a streamlet to refresh and adjust her-

self. Straightening the soft Eastern muslin which enveloped her, she draped it freshly around her in graceful folds, retouched eyes and cheeks with her subtle unguents she had thought to bring with her, and then, combing and tiring her magnificent hair, she let the longer portion fall over her person, and formed the rest into a braid like a diadem on her head, fastening to it the veil, which softened rather than concealed her fine features, as the wrappings around her person revealed more than they hid the perfect outlines of her figure, and, surveying her work in a small metal mirror hanging at her side, she smiled with satisfaction at the result.

“Thou sapphire of splendour,” cried Azalim, in a rapture of admiration as he rejoined and beheld her. “The holy prophet, to whom I am about to present thee, must approve instead of condemning our marriage when he sees thy beauty.”

“Condemning!” repeated Jezebel, angrily.

“I only meant that thou art not a daughter of our people,” explained her lover, in some confusion. “I come to pray thee to stay here awhile, whilst I prepare him for thy reception.”

“I pray thee to haste thy return,” observed Jezebel, not too well pleased at the delay.

“I will use all haste,” said Azalim, as he disappeared into the wood.

CHAPTER VI.

PURSUED

ELIJAH stood at the opening of the cave. He bore marks of deep anxiety on his face, and in his troubled eyes and a general dejection of mien, which told of evil tidings either already revealed or apprehended to be close at hand. He had passed a night wrestling in prayer, for a great weight lay upon his spirit which had not been lifted by prophetic revelation.

Unperceived in his approach by a side-path to the cave, Azalim suddenly appeared before the prophet, at whose feet he fell on bended knee, craving a welcome and a blessing.

“Azalim, my son,” cried Elijah, in a voice of surprised delight, opening his arms as if to embrace him. “The God of Israel be praised for restoring thee to me. Yet,” he added, “what meaneth this loss of the locks of the Nazarite from thy head? Is thy vow broken?”

“Not so, my lord; my captors shaved my head and I had no power to resist them. But what I

could do I have done. No wine nor strong drink hath ever yet passed my lips."

"That is well, my son. Yet one more question. Hast thou bowed thyself in worship before the idols in the houses of the false gods?"

"Never, my lord. Even in the house of Rimmon, where they bound me slave, I have never bowed myself, nor hath my mouth kissed the image of Baal."

"Then art thou welcome, and shalt be blessed now and for evermore. But come within, and rest and refresh thyself, and recount to me all that hath happened since thou wast taken, and how thou hast been delivered from the bondage of our enemies."

"Nay, my lord Elijah, I can neither rest nor refresh myself until I have told the errand that brought me here, and have entreated and obtained thy aid as well as thy blessing."

"Speak, then, my son, and declare thine errand," replied the prophet.

"Doubtless thou knowest, my lord, that thy kinsman Phanuel hath deceived me, and when I was taken by the Syrian bands, and did not speedily return, gave his daughter Zillah, my betrothed bride, to old Isaac of Gilboa to wife."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the prophet. "It is thou who hast been deceived. These tidings cannot

be true. Phaniel is an honourable man who fears God and could not be guilty of such baseness. It must be a tale of false or ignorant tongues."

"Nay," returned Azalim, gravely, "this treachery was told me by two witnesses, Issachar, the son of Boen, who was taken prisoner some while after myself, and the old Ishmaelite merchant who trades in Gilead and was himself at the wedding-feast. There is no mistake. It is no lie," he added, sorrowfully. "I have been wronged and betrayed."

"I have not seen Phaniel since thy capture, my son, and grieve deeply at his unworthiness and the wrong he hath done thee, of which the great evil is that it cannot be repaired."

"Thou canst not wonder, my father, that I have striven to banish Zillah from my heart!" said Azalim.

"No, my son, the wife of another man must be henceforth nothing to thee."

"Nor canst thou blame me," continued Azalim, uneasily, "if I have replaced her by another. Thou hast always urged me to choose a wife in my youth and live joyfully with her, and I come to thee as to my father to ask of thee to give to me for wife her whom I love with all my soul, and have brought here to present as such before thee."

"Whom hast thou chosen?" exclaimed Elijah,

with quick suspicion, fixing his deep-set, penetrating eye keenly on his adopted son.

“ A maiden of Damascus.”

“ An idolater ? ”

“ Yea, — at present.”

“ Whose daughter is she ? ”

“ The daughter of a priest.” Azalim did not venture to add the whole truth by saying what priest.

“ Of Baal ? ” inquired Elijah.

“ Yea.”

“ And,” cried the prophet, raising his hand and standing aside in all the majesty of his grand presence, which seemed to grow larger and higher as he spoke, “ thou, a son of Israel, darest to come to me, a prophet of Jehovah, and tell of thy love for an outlandish woman, and bid me to give her to thee for wife whom thy God hath forbidden thee to wed — forgetting the evils the Moabitish women brought upon thy people, and the sin of Solomon, whose heathen wives stole him from his God. Get thee to the priest her father to wed thee. I abjure thee from henceforth for my son.”

“ My lord Elijah,” cried Azalim, falling at the prophet’s feet and holding the hem of his robe, “ hear me, listen, I pray thee, for the love of my sister Salome. By the mercy of the God of Abraham, spurn me not from thee ! ”

Elijah had made a movement of repulsion when Azalim touched his garment, but at the name of Salome he repressed it. "Speak," he whispered rather than spoke.

"Thou hast told me, father, that the abuse of God's gift of love between man and woman debases the soul more than any other sin, and hast enjoined me to use it as God ordains in the bond of marriage. I obeyed, and Zillah was to have been my bride. She was torn from me. I have loved another with my whole soul, as I have already told thee. I did not seek it. It came to me, took possession of me, and spite of my will I have yielded to it. I would seal this love with marriage, and you refuse this consummation."

"Because the woman is the daughter of the uncircumcised," retorted Elijah.

"True, my father, and were not Rahab and Ruth daughters of the uncircumcised, and yet they were the wives of Israelites, and the foremothers of the royal race of David, from whom thou hast told me the Messiah will come."

Elijah could not refute this uncontrovertible argument, and was silent.

"It is marriage or sin," urged Azalim. "She whom I love is an idolater, — yea, I cannot deny it, and such hold the sanctity of marriage but lightly.

I dare not, as a Syrian prisoner, wed her in her own country. Wilt thou, then, yet refuse to unite us, my lord and my father?"

Still Elijah kept silence.

"I love this woman more than my life," he continued. "I cannot give her up. I would as willingly hew off each limb of my body as part with her."

"The God of Abraham pity the lad," said Elijah, in a sad accent of compassion. "He would sell all he has for this mess of pottage. My son, I may have spoken harshly and hastily to thee upon this matter, but my spirit is chafed by a burden which has laid heavy upon me this night past. The shadows of coming evil lay thick upon our land, and the cause appeared to be approaching and closing around me. The Lord has hid this from me. Yet I will not act in this matter without asking his counsel. Where is the woman whom thou so desirest?"

"In the grove of palms by the pool of the streamlet, my lord."

"Then go back to her. Under that cedar yonder my evening meal is spread. Take and refresh yourselves there, and when I call thee, come, and I will declare to thee the will of Jehovah if he is graciously pleased to reveal it to me."

Elijah retired into the cave and Azalim rejoined Jezebel, until he was summoned by the prophet.

"My son," said Elijah, "thy union with this woman is granted, but I have to warn thee that it will bring upon thyself an evil of the greatest calamity that can befall a living man. That this woman thou so lovest will desert, betray, and be faithless to thee, and moreover, that she will bring ruin and misery upon thy country. Dost thou still desire to possess her?"

Azalim looked straight into the prophet's face. The latter's words seemed to him but idle tales, and even if true, they were not to be weighed against the passion he felt for Jezebel, and he answered: "I do still desire her."

"Then bring her before me!" said Elijah.

She came and stood before the prophet, who greeted her with the brief command:

"Woman, remove thy veil."

With a slow sweep of her hand Jezebel turned aside her veil, and this man and this woman so renowned in the world's history stood face to face, and their eyes met — not as man's and woman's in the language of love, not as two living beings in the interchange of friendship, and not in the deadly hate of enemies, — but on both sides with a half-conscious, half-realized sense of antagonism, danger, and death.

There they stood, and with them, woven into the

grand drama of their lives, was the young herdsman of Gilead, who sought the blessing of the prophet on his marriage with the daughter of Baal's high priest.

"Dost thou love this man, O woman of the stranger's race, with a love strong enough to give him the faithful, true affection due to a husband?" the prophet suddenly demanded of Jezebel, who did not reply in words, only bending her head as an intimation of assent.

"And thou, O man —" continued Elijah, turning to Azalim; he did not finish the sentence, but remained in an attitude of expectation.

"I love her with my whole body, mind, and —"

The prophet raised his hand in interruption. "It is enough," he said. "By the word sent to me on this matter, I give thee this woman of the stranger to wife, O Azalim, son of Shinar, if, on thy part, thou wilt swear by the Lord God of thy fathers that thou wilt never, whatever the provocation may be, put away this thy wife, but wilt remain her husband until death himself deliver to the survivor his writing of divorcement."

Jezebel started forward to protest, but before she had time to speak, Azalim had lifted his hand and eyes to heaven and taken the oath.

"Jehovah deliver thee from all coming evil and

“bless thee in the end thereof, my son,” said the prophet, solemnly, as Azalim bowed himself beneath the outspread hands held over him. But Elijah had no blessing for Jezebel, and when Azalim would have followed his adopted father, as he turned without another word into the cave, to entreat a share in the blessing for his newly made wife, Elijah motioned him away so unmistakably that the baffled husband, with a subdued air little befitting a bridegroom, embraced and saluted his bride, and, taking her hand, led her to their tethered animals, which they mounted in silence and rode away.

Thus, in the mutual awe as of an ill omen, this strange marriage ceremony ended.

The bride and bridegroom soon shook off the depression that hung over them as they left the presence of the prophet. The young do not long fret and forebode. It is rather a serious matter when they can do so. By the time they reached the inn at the nearest village, their spirits had brightened into joyousness, and they were ready for any pleasure that might come in their way.

A roadside inn, three thousand years ago, as little resembled the rural village inns of the Old World as they would the hotel palaces of an American city. Yet, in a fashion, they were like the latter, for their extent must have been equal, as the flocks

and herds and camels and asses of the rich traveller found ample accommodation, and the poor, as was the custom in the ancient village hostelrys, were also admitted.

But the young travellers were not moneyless, and, with the quick instinct of the host in such matters, they were ushered into a well-furnished guest-chamber, there to await the supper to be prepared for them. It soon came, a feast a prince might have enjoyed, consisting of savoury dishes, as Azalim's forefather, Isaac, who we may conclude with reason was rather an epicure, would have loved, — of kid of the goats, and lamb from the flock, and pigeons from the dove-cote, with wheaten bread of the whitest, and oil from the purest olive, and honey from the rock. While the wines were what the present millionaire's gold cannot buy, for they were the unadulterated juice from grapes, the like of which the exhausted earth no longer produces.

Jezebel partook of the wine moderately and mixed with water, and did not appear to notice that her companion only drank the water without the wine.

When the feast was finished and the servants had removed the remains, the host came in, followed by an attendant bearing a skin of wine, from which he filled a cup and pledged the bride and bridegroom, after the immemorial usage of all ages, for Azalim,

on entering, had told their host that he had taken this beautiful woman to wife, and had brought her to receive a blessing at the retreat of the great prophet. Then he poured out two cups for a return pledge, assuring them that a like draught from such a rare vintage was not to be obtained elsewhere on either side the Jordan.

Jezebel raised the cup before her and waited for Azalim to join her, but he made no movement.

"The blessing of the patriarchs on thee, my son," said the host, "and may this fair woman be the fruitful mother of thy children to the latest generations."

"I bless and thank thee, and return the blessing on thine own head," said Azalim, "but the vow of the Nazarite is upon me, and I taste no wine."

The host, disappointed but acquiescent, bowed low before them and left the guest-chamber, but Jezebel's brow was very dark, and when they were alone she remarked:

"Now that this man hath left us thou wilt not fear, my bridegroom, to drink from the same cup as thy bride. It brings luck."

"Didst thou not hear me tell him that I was under a vow?" replied Azalim.

"Yea, but, now that thou hast wedded a Syrian,

thou must give up all these Israelite superstitions," urged Jezebel.

Azalim was silent.

"Pledge me now," she said, rising and seating herself by his side on the couch where he had reclined in eating. "See, I will place my lips here, drink, and thou shalt drain the cup from the same spot."

But Azalim motioned the hand and cup it held away. "I cannot break my vow to Jehovah even for thee, beloved," he said, gravely.

"Thou knowest not the value of what thou refusest," she answered, laughingly. "I will tell thee a tale of Damascus," she went on, caressing him lightly as she spoke, "and it may teach thee not to undervalue what another gave his life to possess. There was a feast of wine in the house of Ashtaroth in honour of the goddess. The captains of the host were sitting at a table when the wine-cups were ready for drink and libation, and as I passed they offered me the goblet which was to be the first to be tasted and poured and —"

"Thou didst take from *their* hands!" interrupted Azalim, angrily.

Jezebel laughed. She was pleased at this little outburst of jealousy.

"Yea, I took it, and was about to taste and pour

it to the gods, when the chief captain seized the cup and swore he would give its weight in golden coin to Ashtaroth if I would taste it again and let him place his lips where mine had touched and pour the libation together. Then the next in rank offered double coin for the same privilege, and so it went around, and the last was the highest bidder, and I said he should win the prize, but the chief captain drew his sword and vowed he should fight for it, and they did fight, and the highest bidder was slain, and the chief captain got the cup kiss, and he deserved it," she added, with a peal of gratified laughter.

But Azalim was not pleased with this story, and he still refused to drink the wine.

Then she caressed and spoke fondly to him, and told him he did not love her, as he refused to grant so trifling a favour as to put his lips upon the spot where hers had rested.

Now and then he seemed about to yield to her blandishments, and then he rallied his resolution and still resisted.

But Jezebel was the more resolved to carry her point at each refusal of her bridegroom, and at last she handled her final weapon. She declared that, as Azalim no longer loved her, she would kill her own love for him, and in order to do this she would

go away and never be either his bride or his wife, and she took up her veil as if to put it on, declaring it was breaking her heart to depart, yet she would do so, and opened the door, looking back a sad farewell as she passed through. Azalim, wearied by her persistence and weakly believing her to be in earnest, seized the cup of red wine, and, springing forward, he held it without a word to Jezebel's lips. She tasted it and then also in silence took the goblet and presented it to her husband, who, without further resistance, raised it to his lips and took a deep draught. Then, dashing the cup upon the ground, he returned to the couch, and, uttering a half-stifled groan, he buried his face in his hands and fell into an attitude of miserable dejection.

Thus it came to pass that Azalim broke his vow of the Nazarite.

The next morning Azalim and his bride set forth on their return journey. They were anxious to arrive at Damascus before the news of Jezebel's abduction by the robbers reached the high priest's ears, and a search should be set on foot by him. Their story was to be that Ethbaal's daughter had been carried into the land of Israel, and, by the aid of her servant Azalim, had escaped and been safely

brought home by him. They rode on with all haste, if not with the frantic speed of their elopement.

They had only covered a few miles of their journey, and were riding up an ascent of which the path did not admit two abreast, when Azalim, who was in advance, suddenly reined up and uttered an exclamation of dismay. Jezebel looked up to see several horsemen on the crest of the hill, and, as they bore lances, they were evidently men of war. "It is a Syrian band," cried Azalim. "I never yet knew them penetrate so far; and, see, they are gathering in force as they see us. Off from the mule, beloved, and mount again behind me. We must head for the Jordan, and if we can reach the fords we are safe. The Syrians have never yet passed the river. To be overtaken means death!"

Jezebel knew well it would be so; knew her father, although not a cruel or bloodthirsty man, was one of stern will and accustomed to uncontrolled power, and if he found her out, — which, were she thus taken, he was sure to do, — it might be worse than death. Ah, no. They must not be taken.

It was well for them both that Azalim had no shrieking, hysterical, helpless woman on his hands. She never once lost presence of mind. Looking back, she marked each horseman that came to the

front, and warned Azalim to guide his way accordingly.

At last a glad cry came from them both. "Water! The river! The Jordan!" and they laughed for joy and pressed onward.

Then another cry almost of terror burst forth from Azalim's lips as they came nearer. "Great and holy Moses," he spoke, in a whisper, "it is — I forgot the harvest, and Jordan overflows his banks in the time of harvest."

It was so, and such an overflow had scarcely been known as that which now spread before the eyes of the baffled fugitives. The whole country was submerged, and in the centre, where the river was deep, the flood flew, rather than rolled, with a frightful rapidity, whilst smaller currents in the shallower flood threw up circling eddies that lashed the flow into a swirling fury only less dangerous than the velocity of the main stream.

Azalim gazed in despair at the scene before him. To cross would be certain destruction. He turned and looked behind, and saw the Syrians only a few hundred feet away, with death as certain in their keeping, and assuredly slower and more horrible than that of the river. He dared not decide, for the life beside him was far more precious to him than his own. Had he been alone, he would have rushed

at the enemy and sold his life dearly. Let her decide.

"Jezebel, beloved of my soul!" he cried. "What sayest thou? Death or surrender?"

"Death," she answered, firmly. "There is a chance in death. None in surrender."

"Death! Then be it so," he answered, and, turning around, he kissed her lips in a mad farewell, and put the horse to the leap. The noble creature, true to his race, the first in the animal world, swerved for a moment, then gave a long, loud neigh and plunged into the boiling flood.

CHAPTER VII.

JERUSALEM

A FEW seconds later and the Syrians would have seized them. With impotent cries of disappointment the pursuers sent a shower of arrows after the fugitives, which, in the wild aim of baffled anger, fell harmlessly into the water.

"Yes, death," murmured Jezebel. "We at least know the worst of that."

Into the hell of waters the three living creatures had leapt and sank, and then rose again, for they were not yet in the terrible master rush. Azalim, trusting to the instinct of the horse, flung the reins on his neck, to which he clung desperately, while Jezebel held on to him. No doubt their weight steadied the steed, as otherwise he would have been overthrown by the force of the water.

More than half-drowned, they rushed on, and Azalim knew that soon they would come to rapids and rocks, where nothing could save them from being dashed to destruction.

At this moment of despair, they came upon a sudden bend of the river, and standing at its corner, just outside the main current, was an enormous sycamore, one of whose giant limbs stretched far out toward them, and, although half-covered with water, Azalim at once perceived it would prove their salvation. "Off the horse!" he cried, "and spring on to the tree!" and as he spoke he set the example, and was floating in the water, holding on to one of the sturdy boughs which started upwards from the branch.

Jezebel had all her senses alive. She had been throughout as cool as her husband, and she also was now close by him, with her arms tightly grasping a twin bough. They looked after their brave companion, who hopelessly struggled some few minutes, then turned over and sank like lead in the devouring flood.

Both uttered a cry of pity, but their own situation was too critical to spend thought or time on any other subject. Jezebel's swathings fettered her action, and it was a work of time and danger to reach the trunk of the tree and climb into its upper branches, which, however, was at last successfully effected, and they rested in temporary safety in a fork of the boughs, too utterly exhausted by submersion and fatigue to realize or apprehend

the peril of their position. After awhile, however, Azalim recovered sufficient strength and sense to look out over the waste of waters in hopeless hope — if such a contradiction could be — of discovering some way of escape.

The tree in which they had found refuge grew on the banks of the river, on the Judean side, where the flood stretched as far as the eye could see. There were not many phases of nature with which Azalim was unacquainted, and he perceived that, although the stream at intervals was deep, and moved with strong rapidity, the larger surface was comparatively shallow and easy for the swimmer. *He* could accomplish it, but Jezebel? A woman of the inland city of Damascus could not be expected to swim, and he could not, in his present state, swim and support her. No, he would stay and die with this beloved of his soul.

Presently, Jezebel shivered exceedingly. The sun was hot and high, but they were chilled to the very marrow of their bones, and trembled with the cold.

“Azalim, my lover, my husband, my life, I feel the wings of the angel of death fluttering over me. Is there no escape? Could we not swim across this terrible lake?” she whispered.

“Swim? O, star of my love!” he cried, even

in his extremity addressing her in Oriental hyperbole. "Thou canst not swim?"

"Not swim," she answered. "My father a Sidonian, and I brought up in Tyre. Not swim! Why, those who live on the seashore swim like the fish under it. Yea, I can swim."

"I never saw the sea," replied Azalim, humbly, "but if thou canst swim, O wife of my love, we are saved."

Without another word Jezebel unwound the wrappings which enveloped her, rolled them in a bundle, and flung it into the river, standing up on the bough ready for the plunge in her undergarments of loose trousers and shirtlike vest made of linen so exquisitely fine as to render it almost as free as muslin from the clogging of water.

"I am ready, my lord," she cried, and as she spoke Azalim sprang off into the water, and like a sea-bird Jezebel flew after her mate, and skimmed rather than floated by his side on the surface of the undulating waves.

There were not many things this Phœnician woman — for she was of the race we moderns term Phœnician — could not do. She had been taught all the arts and sciences of her age, and excelled in whatever it might be that she undertook.

In a transport of admiration the young husband

watched her graceful, skilful movements, and was about to utter some enamoured applause when they encountered a dangerous eddy and deep water beyond, and he had to exchange the romantic homage of his love for the silent caution of action.

They reached dry land safely, and, seeing a village in the distance, made their way to it, and were received with kindly care. Hot baths revived their shivering limbs, food restored their strength, and then a long rest and sleep renewed their overstrained brains and nerves, so that in a day or two no ill effects remained from their perilous adventure.

But they felt great anxiety and perplexity as to their situation. To return to Syria was impossible at present, as it could not be done without recrossing the Jordan, and to stay in the villages would attract too much observation, thus giving a clue in case of pursuit.

It was about the time of the harvest feast of weeks at Jerusalem, and the roadways were crowded with companies going up to the holy city; it occurred to Azalim that they could not take a better step than to join one of these. He felt a pride in the thought of showing his young wife the glories of the capital of his people, and the singular beauty of the temple, whose solemn services he hoped

might impress Jezebel in favour of the worship of Jehovah, for Azalim was as yet true to his country, his religion, and his God.

"Where are all these bands of men, women, and children going?" inquired Jezebel, thus giving him the opportunity he had wished, to propose the journey.

"To Jerusalem, the city of the great King David," replied her husband. "They are going to join the rejoicings of one of our feasts. The city is gay and crowded, and should I not be proud to see thee, thou fairest among women, eclipse the beauty of the women of my people? Shall we join the companies?"

"Yea," returned Jezebel, pleased with the flattery and prospect of the excitement of celebrating a feast, even if it were an Israelitish religious one. "Let us go; my father will never think we are hiding in Jerusalem."

To the City of Zion accordingly they went. They had saved, in their perilous crossing of the Jordan, the coins and gems which Jezebel had provided, having securely bound them in their vests before leaving the inn on their attempted return to Damascus, so they felt no lack of the attention and comfort which money procures for the traveller.

Jerusalem was astir with movement and inci-

dent. The inhabitants threw open their doors in large-hearted hospitality, and the greeting of friends and kinsfolk resounded everywhere. Jezebel was delighted with the gaiety and excitement of the passing scene, and her sense of beauty fully appreciated the unique and stately architecture of the temple upon its commanding mount, and the neighbouring situation of Mount Zion, so celebrated in the songs of the royal poet.

She made no objection to her husband's proposal to attend the temple worship. They parted at the entrance, for although a separate court for the women was not set aside until the great temple restoration by King Herod, yet in the original building of Solomon, they assembled separately from the men, occupying the precincts and the corridors adjoining the great central courts where the men prayed. The Levites sang and the priests offered the sacrifices and incense to the Lord of Hosts.

It was the time of the offering of the morning sacrifice, and, despite her dislike, prejudice, and unbelief in the God of the Hebrews, Jezebel was awed and moved by the noble simplicity and majesty of the worship, its rites, and attendant ceremonies. With heathen habits, which could neither pray to nor praise her gods without incessant move-

ments and gestures of the body before some visible presence, she felt baffled and disappointed, when invited to join the congregation, not to distinguish an image, an idol, or a picture before which she could worship, and she was utterly at a loss as to what or to whom she should address her adoration.

There was the golden seven-branched candlestick, but even Jezebel could not pray to a candlestick. There was the altar of sacrifice, the altar of incense, the brazen laver, but no, they were not gods. Then her eye fell upon the curtains veiling the holy place, and she wondered what mystery was behind them. No doubt the great image of Jehovah was there, and on special occasions the veil was withdrawn and all the world fell down and worshipped the image, which, of course, like Baal's, was of gold. Then she caught sight of the embroidered cherubim on the curtains. Ah! there at last was something! and she began demonstrating and genuflecting to these portraitures until the angry looks and whispered words of the women around, who had not viewed the presence of the beautiful Moabitish woman, as they styled her, with favour, silenced her effusion.

When the service of song and praise began, Jezebel wondered, admired, and yet disapproved. This was sustained by men's voices only, trained

to the most finished perfection of solo melody and part harmony. No high, clear treble of boys' voices. No shrill, sweet soprano of women mingled with the majestic volume of the rolling echoes as the processions of divine praise passed by, or in the choruses grouped around the altar. The singers materially and musically went before and the minstrels followed *after*, supporting and accompanying, but never drowning the voices. The angels might have listened and thought for once that music was not a lost art upon this earth.

They were all Levites, the sons of Asaph and of song, this magnificent choir. All Levites, too, these consummately skilled performers on the musical instruments. Clothed, every man of them, in pure linen, clean and white from their heads to their feet. Men, too, of such fine port and appearance, there was not a king then reigning but would have coveted to see such men marching before him to battle.

Jezebel stamped her foot and frowned her brow. She could not deny the splendour of the music. Yes, splendour, for it seemed to express colour, light, the varied radiance of a rainbow, the phantasm of a happy dream, the march of a triumphant army, the devotion of a martyr, the exaltation of

a saint. Why should Jehovah have all this, and Baal —

Yet she reasoned she liked the music of Baal better. The clash of the deafening noise of sackbuts and cymbals and the sensuous voices of women and boys was pleasanter than these severe sounds which made the hearer feel as though she desired to be a better, or, at least, a different woman. No, the worship of Jehovah as interpreted by its music would not suit her.

When the high priest appeared, and with the attendant priests, his sons, offered the sacrifice and prepared the incense, which only the consecrated family dared to present, Jezebel again experienced the same conflicting feelings. She was angry at the favourable impression made, and yet all the while she disliked and had no proclivity toward the ritual of the homage to Jehovah.

“A lamb,” she said to herself, “a poor, weak, hapless creature to be offered to a god. Why, Moloch would thunder his wrath upon us, if he had not his share of living infants amongst our sacred presentations to Baal! I would not be the priest who spared his gashes when the leaping rushes on his altars are made,” and Jezebel laughed with pleasure as she recalled this horrid rite, for she was cruel of nature and of heart, and would

have applauded the scenes of a Spanish bull-fight, and turned down her thumb for a gladiator's death in the Coliseum had she been a vestal.

When she joined her husband in an outer vestibule, which led to the chambers assigned to the officiating priests and Levites, Azalim, whose whole being had been entranced and uplifted by the solemn services, all the more impressive from their extreme simplicity, asked Jezebel what she thought of the temple worship, and, knowing her love of precious stones, inquired if she did not admire the brilliant radiance of those in the breastplate of the high priests.

"Yea, they are well enough," she retorted, with something like a sneer, "but the eyes in the great image of Baal at Baalbec shine brighter than they."

"But life of my soul," returned Azalim, troubled at her indifference, "thou must allow that not a god in Syria receives such pure and fragrant incense as that which arose from the altar of our temple, and was wafted by the censers of our priests."

"Yes, too pure and too fragrant for me and my gods," she assented. "Give me the pungent delirious incense of Baal, which intoxicates like new wine, and makes us feel like the gods themselves."

"And leaves a sickening sense of staleness," said Azalim.

"Never think of after consequences," remarked Jezebel. "It spoils the present."

"Surely, thou hast never heard singing more worthy of thy gods, Jezebel," continued Azalim, not perceiving, in his eagerness to obtain some commendation of the temple worship, that the subject was distasteful to his companion.

"I was so much occupied in observing thee, Azalim," she said, "that I had no time or thought for music or ceremonies."

Azalim's eyes lighted up with pleasure at this speech of his bride, but his gratified vanity and affection was speedily quenched.

"I did not know, as I watched thee," she continued, in a mocking tone, "whether the most to admire your devotion or to wonder where you found its object. Not the smallest image of a god could I see. From thy earnest gaze, my bridegroom, I supposed thou wert seeking vainly for thy God in space."

As she spoke, a grave, dignified Levite, in his white, flowing robe, passed. He heard the latter part of her speech, and said:

"Not vainly, daughter of the stranger. The Lord God of Israel fills all space."

Then he passed on, and Jezebel, with a lowering brow, angrily noted the rebuke.

"Come away," said Azalim, laying his hand on her arm. "We have no right here. These are the chambers of the Levites; none else are permitted the entrance."

"Thy priests are not sacred to me," retorted his bride. "Let us see how they would suit the prophets of Baal!" and before Azalim could stop her, she had opened the door nearest to her and entered.

It was a small room, ascetic enough for a mediæval monk, plainly furnished like the prophet's chamber, with a bed, a stool, a table, and a candlestick. Nothing else, save a manuscript copy of the law of Moses on the table and a scroll fastened to the wall, on which the ten commandments were inscribed, and before which knelt a youth on the verge of earliest manhood, the charm of whose countenance, singularly attractive from its frank ingenuousness of expression, was greatly enhanced in interest by the intense, yet quiet earnestness with which he regarded the scroll, as his lips moved in silent supplication, apparently too deeply felt to be audibly spoken.

He was too completely absorbed to hear the opening of the door, or to be conscious of the entrance of the intruders, when, suddenly, a woman's laugh close beside him caused him to start up from

his knees, for it was so full of amusement and ridicule it cut him like a lash. He turned around, confused and flushed, to face a woman of a startling, dazzling beauty which might have belonged to the goddess Ashtaroth of Israel's heathen neighbours.

"Is this thy god," said Jezebel, mockingly, "or is it a letter from him promising gold and silver and flocks and herds, fair maidens, and success in war? None too little to reward such a devotee of prayer as I saw in thy face, fair youth. May I read the message?"

He did not answer, but stood gazing upon her as though scarcely comprehending what he saw or what she said.

"Thou shalt *not!* Thou shalt *not!*" she read, with a fragment of the same laugh at the end of each sentence. "What a hard god is thine! Mine is more indulgent. His name is Baal, and he says 'Thou shalt' to everything I desire to have or to do. Say, is not mine a pleasanter god than thine?"

The blush of false shame and moral cowardice deepened upon the smooth, young cheek and brow. He could not speak.

"Thou hast not a word to say for thy god then, who denies thee all pleasant things. Perhaps I wrong him, and it is thy mother who tells her

darling he 'shall not.' Tell me, thou fair and comely youth, where hath she hid thy swaddling clothes?"

He looked angry now, so angry that Jezebel changed back again, and said:

"'Tis not thy mother, then, but thy god after all. Let us not disturb thee, fair lad. Prostrate again to this stern deity, if thou art not ashamed to confess him before one who, like myself, is of a strange people, and worships kinder gods."

Was he ashamed? His face, his neck, his very hands were on fire, he hung his head and turned away. But he did *not* again prostrate or kneel, he did not confess. He stood rigid and silent as the mocking woman's laugh of ridicule rippled and rang along the echoing courts as she passed away out of his sight and hearing.

Jezebel speedily wearied of Jerusalem, and as soon as the fords of Jordan were passable, she persuaded Azalim to start for Damascus. They met with neither danger nor adventure on their journey back, and, having invented a plausible story of escape from the robbers, were received with great satisfaction by the eunuch in charge, who lost no time in notifying the high priest at Baalbec of their safe arrival.

Ethbaal's alarm at the abduction of his daugh-

ter had been so great that he resolved for the future to keep her under his own guardianship. He accordingly gave up the house in Damascus, and transferred his daughter to his own home at Baalbec. Amongst the personal attendants who accompanied her, Azalim was included. He had been greatly praised and richly rewarded for his supposed rescue of the captured maiden, and was appointed to a high office in the priest's family.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZILLAH

ON a sunny slope at the foot of one of the mountains of Gilead, a young maiden was seated under the shade of the many trees which grew around it, keeping her father's sheep, like Rachel of olden time.

She was very fair to look upon, fairest among the many beautiful daughters of her people, with a mingled sweetness of disposition and firmness of character which marked her as gifted with more enduring qualities than mere outward comeliness. Yet it appeared as though a cloud hung over her heart as well as on her beauty, for her countenance was sad almost to hopelessness, her eyes held unshed tears, and her lips quivered as though words would not come if wanted, and her head and figure drooped like a lily upon whom a withering storm of hail has fallen.

She was Zillah, the daughter of Phanuel, and the betrothed bride of Azalim, the young Gileadite

who had believed too hastily the treacherous tale of her inconstancy, and transferred his affection and title of husband to another woman, while, all unconscious of the wrong, she was sorrowing for her lost one, and praying the Lord God of Israel to have pity on the unhappy prisoner and give him favour in the eyes of his captors.

It was six months since the Syrian bands had seized Azalim and his cattle, and Zillah still mourned for him as keenly as on the day he was carried off.

She happened to raise her eyes, and saw a lad from the house approaching her with a letter in his hand.

“What is it, Gad?” she inquired as he came up to her.

“A letter for thee, daughter of Phanuel,” replied the youth, “thy mother says it is from the herdsman, and thou mightest desire to read it alone. Issachar, the son of Boen, hath brought it from Damascus.”

“Stay thou with the sheep, Gad,” said Zillah, “and look after the lads that they do not worry them,” — for two young boys lay under a tree in attendance on Zillah to assist in driving and gathering, — “and I will presently come again.”

She retreated into a grove of trees to read her letter in solitude, and when alone fell on her knees

in thankfulness too deep for words. She tenderly kissed the superscription, moistening it with tears of joy, and then with fingers trembling with delight and excitement, she broke the seals, unwound the cord, and read as follows:

“ZILLAH, DAUGHTER OF PHANUEL:—As thou art the wife of another man, and I the husband of another woman, I dare not, if I would, speak to thee now in the words of love which was once the only language between us two. Zillah! when the tidings of thy treachery reached me, I prayed Jehovah to take away my life, for what good did it do me when thou hadst proved faithless? But pride and indignation came to help me, and the daughter of the stranger rose up and comforted me, and I have taken her to wife in thy stead, and am consoled. It is not meet for an Israelite to bear malice against a daughter of his people, therefore, Zillah, I bid thee Godspeed, and pray that thou mayest be happy with old Isaac of Gilboa, that he will prove a faithful husband and thou a happy wife and the joyful mother of children. Thy *once* loved and loving

AZALIM.”

Zillah read these terrible lines through, not once or twice only, but she no more comprehended their

import than if it had been an hieroglyphic inscription from a mummy of old Egypt. What did it mean, — this jumble of husbands and wives and old Isaac and the daughter of the stranger and the treachery of herself? What could it mean?

She sank down upon a bank, and again, with more collected thought, read the miserable tidings, and as she read, the truth dawned upon her. It was her lover who had been faithless. Either through treachery, or because he had been deceived, he had deserted her and taken another. It was all over, inevitably, irretrievably over between them, and the love of her life was wasted and cast aside; it was gone from her, and nothing would ever restore or replace it.

After a fortunate burst of passionate weeping, she washed her eyes and face at a stream close by, and then returning to Gad, desired him to take her place for the rest of the day, as she was going home, and would not return.

She hurried to the house, and finding her father and mother, she fell at her father's feet, and, while the tears fell from her eyes like rain upon the ground, bade them read the letter.

Their grief and consternation were almost equal to her own. Her father — the first to recover himself — said, "There must have been treachery and

evil report in this matter, and we must strive to discover it. I will send at once for Issachar, who brought the message and has been a prisoner with Azalim and other captives in Syria. Now I mind me, he hath not explained how it is that he alone obtained liberty."

Issachar obeyed. A secret shame oppressed him for the part he had played, but he had told his lie and received good payment for the same, and felt he must abide by it. He entered with a guileless expression on his face and affected surprise at his summons.

"My son," began Phaniel, "we have here a message from Azalim, thy fellow prisoner in Damascus, informing us that my daughter Zillah is given in marriage to old Isaac of Gilboa. Dost thou know how and from whom such a false report can have arisen?"

Issachar pretended to reflect. "Yes," he responded after a few moments. "Now I think of it, I do recollect that the tidings came of Zillah's wedding. Perchance — I do not know — but it may have been brought by the old Ishmaelite merchant who travels hither. Yes, he did say he had been at the wedding-feast."

"Impossible," cried Phaniel, "were I so base as to deceive Azalim, I would never sacrifice my

daughter to an old dotard who desires every maiden he sees for a wife. But we must counsel how to undo this evil. Thou must contrive with me, my son, to carry the contradiction of this lie to Azalim himself."

"But how about this outlandish woman he has taken to wife," Zillah's mother interposed. "Who is she?" turning to Issachar.

"I never heard of a wife," returned Issachar, now honestly astonished. "There was a woman grand and beautiful as a queen, and rich as Solomon, who cast her eyes upon Azalim, but she loved him as great ladies in Damascus love their slaves, not as a wife her lawful husband."

"Who was she, I repeat?" urged his inquirer.

"The daughter of one of Baal's highest priests, and there was a tale that she and Azalim fled away together, and came back pretending they had fallen among thieves."

"Does he love her?" whispered Zillah, timidly.

"At first no," replied Issachar, and then hesitatingly — "after he heard of thy marriage with old Isaac, he fell as it were into her snares, and Samson of old was not more enslaved by the Philistine than he is with this Damascene, but I have heard no word of marriage."

“ Well, my son, thou hast told us enough, — nay, more than enough,” observed Phanuel, mournfully. “ The Lord do so to them and more also who have wronged us so bitterly. Zillah, come near,” he said, and when she did so, he took her in his arms, embraced her tenderly, and blessed her. Then he signed to her mother to take her away, and entered into an anxious consultation with Issachar as to the best means of disabusing Azalim’s mind of the false rumour of Zillah’s marriage, and, if possible, rescuing him from captivity, for Issachar’s strong conviction that the fancy of the great lady for the young Hebrew was of a passing nature led Phanuel to hope that it might be equally evanescent on the other side, and, knowing the strong love existing between his daughter and her betrothed husband, he trusted in the end all might be brought right.

Issachar displayed great zeal in the project, and proposed many plans. It is scarcely needful to add that he took care none of them should succeed.

Zillah did not fall sick or publicly display her trouble by tears, lamentations, or dejected bearing. She was pale and quieter than usual, but she went about her duties as though no storm had passed over and shattered her life. Alone on the hillsides with her sheep, good spirits came around and encompassed her, and, like another Joan of Arc, with

a different mission, and in truth with a higher aim, she dreamed dreams and saw visions.

So time went on, and suitors came to Phanuel asking for his daughter as wife for their sons or themselves, and when one more approved than the rest appeared, the father proposed the matter to his child.

"My father," she said, "speak no more to me of marriage. Jehovah hath called me to his service, and I own no other."

"Do I hear aright?" cried the astonished Phanuel. "Dost thou mean to die without having fulfilled the duties of a true Hebrew woman as wife and mother?"

"Yea, my father. The word of the Lord hath come to me, and the desire of wife and motherhood hath passed away from me."

"What wilt thou do then, my child?"

"After the manner of our women, I will bewail my virginity on the mountains, and then go to my Lord Elijah, our holy kinsman, and pray him to declare unto me the will of the God of our fathers."

Phanuel and his wife were deeply disappointed, but there was a gentle persistence in Zillah, and a secret conviction in their own minds of a higher command being laid upon their daughter, which

checked any outward opposition, and before long Zillah prepared for her vigils on the mountains.

She had a friend named Anah, young and fair like herself, whose young life had also been blighted by an unhappy love. She was like Zillah in not being of the light nature which easily transfers its affections, and, like her friend, she also felt a strong vocation to enter the exclusive service of Jehovah, and elected to join Zillah in her purpose.

The morning of their departure came, and Zillah and Anah, with their pitchers on their shoulders and bread in their wallets, stood at the door of Phanuel's house, where, with tears and blessings, the father and mother bade them farewell. At a little distance, the many servants and dependents of the rich man gathered in silent sorrow, for all knew that the fair daughter of the house was vowed to the Lord God of Israel, and would return to live there no more. It was even so, and from that day all joy left the house of Phanuel and his wife. Zillah was their only child; like Jephtha, they had beside neither son nor daughter. They strove not to grudge the gift they yielded rather than offered, for it added a pang to the separation to feel that they had not sacrificed it willingly. They had not dared to refuse their daughter to the Lord, but it was not until the close of their lives that

they were able to say with their whole hearts, "Behold, we will come into thy presence with the free-will offering up of the child that thou hast given us."

For three long months Zillah and Anah mourned upon the mountains, and in the stillness of the night the dwellers in the valleys would be awakened and startled by the long moans of lamentation wailing from the summits, or echoing in the ravines of the high hills where the two solitary wanderers kept their almost unceasing watch and grievous bewailing.

It was not the loss of wifehood and motherhood in themselves that they so bitterly lamented. It was the forfeit of the crowning ambition and hope of the Hebrew women to obtain the wondrous honour of giving birth to the Shiloh who was to come as the great earthly king of the chosen race, for, although already clearly foretold, it was as yet but dimly understood by them that the Messiah, when he appeared in the flesh, was only to be born of the royal line of David. Bareheaded and barefooted, they went their way. The hot sun beat by day upon their unprotected heads, and the moon smote them with her baleful beams by night. They fasted from all pleasant food; they partook sparingly of bread and water placed for them at cer-

tain stations on the mountains, and sleep was equally curtailed. It was a true vigil of mourning, lamentation, and woe, varied only by fasting and earnest supplications that their sacrifice might be accepted, and their service revealed to them.

CHAPTER IX.

FOOD FOR THE LEPER! FOOD!

LYING near, but not adjoining the great deserts, there spread another, not of the same immense extent, but yet so large and wide, and so utterly desolate and barren, as to be shunned in terror by all travellers on account of its bad reputation and dangerous localities. Evil spirits were believed to haunt its rocky recesses, and the progeny of the fiery flying serpent lurked amidst its sands. Not one drop of water existed within its whole extent, and no beast of prey cared to prowl where there was no life save that of the reptile to furnish him with food.

No animal life, no, — but there was human life, for on its borders the miserable leper made his habitation. His awful cry, "Unclean! unclean!" resounded far over the pleasant land adjoining, where the olive grew and the vine clung, and butter and honey and corn and wine were plentiful, but from which he was for ever banished.

We of this twentieth century still suffer a few cureless diseases, but the worst of these are but as specks on a white garment compared to the original leprosy from which, probably, our cancerous germs are derived, for this disease resembled the same garment soiled from head to hem with an uncleansable defilement. The blood that ran through the veins, the marrow that filled the bones, the flesh that covered them, and the awful white of the skin that encased this living epitome of the grave, — all bore the marks of the most deadly infliction that ever fell upon the mortal frame of humanity.

The dread of their vicinity, their approach, or even appearance, affected the untainted with a kind of madness, not altogether without cause. The slightest touch was contagion, the breath of their very sigh infection, and so loathsome was the sight of their bodies that it was known to give a shock to the beholder that inoculated the disease in him, whilst the dwelling inhabited by a leper had to be pulled down as dangerous for healthy habitation. The very beasts shunned their neighbourhood, and would not come near their persons.

Small wonder that the lepers, in their turn, shrank from communion with their fellows. Humiliated, wounded, and crushed in spirit, they were

as eager to fly from the uninfected as the latter were to escape from them, and the doleful cry of "Unclean! unclean!" sounded without fail, whenever a leper perceived any living being within sight.

This desert was a refuge for these miserable creatures. Here they could gather together without fear of molestation, safe from the stabs of scorn and repulsion. In this desolation they were in security, but, on the other hand, they were exposed to its consequent privations, and many among them perished from neglect and starvation.

A highroad traversed this region, now touching the borders of the desert, and again stretching across the fertile country that bounded it. This highway was much frequented, as it connected many towns and villages, and was, indeed, the chief roadway of the province.

Not far from this great artery of travel, a narrow pathway led to a spot held sacred by all the Israelites, who still retained the faith and traditions of their fathers. It was an altar which had been built and dedicated to Jehovah by one of the patriarchs during his wanderings. Here, on the Sabbaths and high festivals ordained by the law of Moses, the faithful were wont to assemble to worship the God of Israel. They met in secret like the sturdy Covenanters of Scotland, or the

Huguenots of Cevennes, for the golden calf was at this time Israel's established religion, and persecution of the truth its natural result.

This altar, known by the name El Rilboa, was situated on a small plateau with a background of wooded hills, and commanded an exclusive prospect of the country below with the illimitable desert on the one side and the fertile country on the other.

An hour or so before midday two veiled women waited at the door of the house of Elijah the prophet and gave as their message their desire to inquire of the Lord. On being admitted they made low obeisance before the holy man and awaited his greeting in silence.

"Daughters of Israel," he addressed them, "what seek ye? and what counsel or help do ye desire at my hand?"

The foremost of the two raised her veil. "My Lord Elijah," she said, "behold me the daughter of Phanuel thy kinsman, once" — her voice faltered — "the betrothed wife of thy brother-in-law and adopted son, Azalim the son of Shinar — and I and my friend here by my side are come to hear from thee the will of God concerning us."

The prophet's brow grew dark. "True," he replied, coldly, "thou art the daughter of Phanuel and

wast the betrothed of Azalim, but thou hast not said that thou art now the wife of Isaac, of Gilboa."

"Nay, my lord, not so," she answered, humbly, "I am no wife; scarce a moon hath passed since I returned with this my companion from bewailing our virginity on the mountains. We have vowed to give ourselves as servants of the most high God and seek his will at thy mouth as to how we can best serve him."

Elijah was troubled. Was this true? He could not doubt her; and if so, what had he done? Deceit truly there must have been, but with whom? With Azalim? No, he could not believe that, and yet —

"Kinswoman," he said, after a short pause, and with a gentle tenderness that seemed in strange keeping with his usual stern manner and rugged appearance, "I would fain believe that neither Phanuel nor thyself have acted basely in this matter, and yet it was from the lips of Azalim himself I learnt that Isaac had taken thee to wife."

"Alas! My lord," responded Zillah, sadly, "it was from Azalim also that I received not only the false accusation of my marriage but the message that he had replaced me by wedding the daughter of the stranger."

“How did he convey this message to thee?” demanded the prophet.

“By letter, at the hand of Issachar, the son of Boen, my lord.”

Again Elijah paused and thought of treachery; but he had received an assent from Jehovah to the marriage of his adopted son to an idolater, and Azalim had sworn before him never in life to annul the union. The act was done; it could not be undone, and further question or discussion of the subject would only open afresh the wound his young kinswoman had received, so with even a still kinder accent of sympathy, he said:

“The God of Israel take pity on thee, my daughter, and bestow upon thee a husband seven times more worthy of thy love.”

“No, my lord,” replied Zillah, firmly, “the happiness of wife and mother is as lost to me as though I already lay in my grave-clothes, the bride of death. I am vowed only to the Lord God of our fathers, and I and my friend, who is bound by the same vows, come to thee to declare the service he will accept from us.”

“And be thy gift both blessed and accepted by him,” returned the prophet. “Meet me at the altar of El Rilboa on the eve of the next Sabbath. Bring with you a living and unblemished lamb of the first

year. Spend the interval in supplication and prayer, and then will I declare unto you both the will of Jehovah. Until then, take my blessing and depart in peace."

At the appointed time Zillah and Anah repaired to the altar, taking with them a spotless lamb of the flock which the prophet received from their hands, killed, and prepared ready for sacrifice.

But in doing this, he did not arrogate to himself the office of the consecrated sons of Aaron. The ceremonies ordained in the temple offering were not followed by Elijah. His method of sacrifice was the sign manual of his prophetic mission to a revolted people who had rejected the temple worship and despised its priests, and yet were not as yet left without a teacher and a witness.

The lamb lay lifeless on the altar. The praise was offered. The prayer was said and the two maidens waited in expectancy to see the prophet apply the fire which should send its flame and smoke in upward homage to the Most High. But Elijah made no sign. He stood as if entranced at some distance from the altar with his gaze bent steadfastly upon it. They looked around to see if the fire were prepared, and then perceived that there was no brazier or light upon the altar or anywhere in sight.

Suddenly a light shone above them, and it ap-

peared to the two startled and awestruck women that a cloud had suddenly opened, and from it a tongue of flame fell like a lightning flash upon the altar; instantly a consuming fire played upon the sacrifice and then as rapidly ascended from whence it came, leaving only a small heap of gray ash.

Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle when the fire reascended; the young maidens fell upon their knees, and the three remained awhile in silent prayer.

At last the prophet broke this silence. "Behold, O daughters of Israel," he cried, "Jehovah has accepted your offering, and lo! as at the first sacrifice offered by Abel at the beginning of our race, the fire of the living God hath descended upon it. Henceforward, ye shall be the virgin daughters of the King of Kings!

"Yea, and more also," continued Elijah, taking from beneath his robe a horn of oil and holding it above their kneeling figures and bowed heads, "Ye shall be consecrated as the chosen handmaids of the Most High to fulfil his will from this time forth until the end that hath no end."

He poured the anointing oil upon their heads, which bent yet lower in holy humility and the ecstatic rapture of celestial love.

When the two consecrated maidens rose from their knees, Zillah approached the prophet, and said:

“My Lord Elijah, do we, thy handmaids, presume when we desire to know the will of the Lord concerning us?”

“Keep your souls in patience,” was Elijah’s answer. “Ye shall not leave this place until thy work is revealed.”

For awhile silence reigned around that solitary altar, and then it was broken by the noise of a company below on the highroad hastening to reach the next village before sunset ushered in the Sabbath, for its observance in this respect still survived the general irreligion of the country. As they passed below, another sound broke out from the direction of the desert, a long, loud, doleful cry of “Unclean! Unclean!”

They looked toward the desert and saw some ten or twelve unhappy lepers running and leaping toward the highroad, and as they ran they varied their cry with another, “Food for the leper! Food!”

They were nearly starving, these miserable victims, for they were poor, and how could a leper earn his bread when none dared employ him. The rich, when visited by this horrible disease, dwelt in their own separate houses, and, although under social and domestic ban, commanded all the bodily necessities and comforts money can procure. But the poor, the

man who is destitute, what must it have been for him, whose very vicinity meant disease and death.

Has the reader ever seen a stampede of wild cattle? Probably he has not. Has he ever witnessed a panic of frightened humanity? Possibly he has done so. Then he will understand the confusion and flight of the travellers who beheld this group of loathsome, dangerous men come in sight. They lashed their stubborn asses. They urged on their sullen camels. They uttered cries of alarm and anger and impeded the onward progress of their companions by their frantic rush, and although distant, the lepers continued parallel with their flight, wailing their doleful cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" varied by the maddening one, "Food for the lepers! Food! Food! Food!"

Some of the more kindly of the flying crowd cast bread and meat behind them as they escaped, and on this the lepers fell like famished wolves, tearing and eating as they leapt along the desert border. At last the passers-by were lost to view, and then the lepers, having cleared the road of the provisions thrown them, retreated once more into the desert, uttering their melancholy warning, "Unclean! Unclean!" and their howl of hunger, "Food for the leper! Food!"

Elijah turned to Zillah. "Behold thy service,"

he said. "The Lord God hath given his lepers unto thy care."

"How shall I serve? What can we do?" replied Zillah, perplexed and uncertain. "O my lord, instruct as to the manner of this service."

"Go, handmaids of Jehovah! and at each step his spirit shall direct you. Only desire to serve with singleness of heart and your way shall be aright. Go in peace!"

Zillah went back to her father and told him all that had happened, and of her vow and its acceptance. Neither her father nor mother offered any obstacle to her dedication, and Phaniel, who had received private instructions from Elijah, bestowed upon his daughter the same large dowry destined for her marriage with Azalim. Zillah well considered her plans, and having sought counsel and aid from the elders of her people, proceeded without loss of time to execute them.

With assistance, she obtained land in the vicinity of the altar of El Rilboa, which she laid out in gardens and vineyards, and upon which she built a house. She then raised a long line of shelters in the desert facing the north, and protected behind the shadow of great rocks. A little beyond, a stone tower held a bell which, when rung, sounded far over desert and plain, and was answered by an-

other from a turret in Zillah's house. When all these erections were finished, the whole was completed by a small building placed at an angle close to the main road where several others crossed it. It consisted of one room only, in the door of which a shutter opened inwards, and below this opening a network of fine wire received without damage all that might be thrown within. Over the portal was the inscription in letters of brass:

“In the Name of God! Food for the Leper! Food!”

There was never any failure of supply. No, not once. In early morning the bell rang from Zillah's turret, and an answering succession of strokes pealed forth from the tower of the wilderness, giving notice of the number of lepers who were ready for the noonday meal to be prepared for them.

The family of Zillah and Anah consisted of a deaf and dumb youth who was the hewer of wood and drawer of water for the household. A wise woman, who from early widowhood had devoted her life to the mixing of potions and ointments for the sick and poor, and was nearly as wise as Solomon himself in the knowledge of herbs and their properties, joined the family of Zillah in serving the lepers. If her balsams and draughts

did not cure the dreadful disease, they certainly alleviated it. Besides these, a man and his wife lived close by, literally in a "lodge in her garden of cucumbers." He acted as an overseer of the little estate of stock and produce which maintained Zillah's home, hiring labourers as needed, and otherwise directing the farm whilst his wife assisted in the business of the house.

When the strokes from the desert bell had been counted, Zillah, Anah, and Zulph, the deaf and dumb lad, proceeded to the depot on the highway, unlocked the door and withdrawing the contributions, placed them in the panniers on the mules they had brought with them.

The provisions thus supplied consisted chiefly of loaves of bread, cheeses, flesh baked or dried in the sun, pressed cakes of figs and raisins, with the pungent vegetables, such as leek, onions, and garlic, so valued in hot climates. All these lay in generous abundance on the wired grating.

It was remarkable that each day's supply was exactly, yet liberally, apportioned to the varying number of the leper guests from the desert. Were they many or were they few, this strange commissariat never perceptibly exceeded and never visibly ran short. It seemed to be an anticipatory

fulfilment of the phrase in the all-comprehensive prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread!"

Then the work of preparation began; by noon the meal was spread upon the tables where the guests had laid, according to their number, the cups and platters of metal provided for them. Zillah, Anah, and Zulph, who brought the food, tied plantain and gourd leaves around their hands and feet to avoid contagion, and quickly filling the pitchers with water and the dishes with the meats, collected their own utensils, laid them upon the mules, and returned home, and it was not until the turret bell had given notice of their having reached it that the lepers gathered to their feast.

Thus Zillah performed her service of love to man, and devotion to God, from the day the storehouse on the wayside was built, until that of her death.

CHAPTER X.

BAALBEC

CHANGE begets change, and far more was involved in the destinies of Azalim and Jezebel by the transition to Baalbec than the mere material difference of abode. It brought about a transformation of character and consequently of action, which led to events of the greatest importance in the lives of both.

Baalbec was a large and flourishing city, and by right of its mighty temple of the sun-god Baal, was the religious capital of Syria. The vast extent of this temple rendered it almost a city in itself, and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that our churches, nay our cathedrals, might have been side chapels within its immense enclosure. The beauty of the pillars which supported the lofty roof, the wonderful flights of steps that led up in every direction, the majestic porticos, the marble inlayings, curious carvings and treasures of gold and silver which filled the interior, rendered this huge

building the glory of heathendom, and made it the sole recipient of the title of temple among the gods of Western Asia.

The doors were never closed, day or night. The services, if such we may call them, never ceased. The crowds of worshippers rarely lessened. At the shrines of the lesser gods, the women of the groves sang their praises and danced in their honour; at the high altars of Baal, the priests bowed and repeated incessant prayers; and processions and pageants passed continually from the dawn, when they commenced, to the succeeding one on the morrow. Jezebel was the most ardent of devotees. She lived in the temple, taking her meals at the stalls of the merchants who provided for the wants of the pious habitués, and often sleeping in adjoining chambers after the culminating midnight performances.

And what of Azalim? Did he remain steadfast to the God of his fathers in this dense air of tainted idolatry? He had stood firm in the house of Rimmon. Did he imbibe the infection now? Like the traveller about whom the sun and wind wrangled as to which should force him to throw off his cloak, the young Hebrew had wrapped his garment closer when opposed, and now cast it aside when unassailed.

From the moment when the ringing laugh of Jezebel mocked the young Levite, a chill had fallen upon the faith of Azalim. He was conscious of it. He lamented, but he feebly reasoned that he could do nothing. What he could do he did not. He sought no help when help was to be obtained and so no help came. He was left alone and he fell, and great was his fall.

Jezebel acted very astutely. She did not argue or persuade, and she ceased to ridicule his religious beliefs. She treated him with a gentle pity as being outside the pale, and ignored him altogether when she started for her worship. This neglect offended his self-importance, and deprived him of her society, and one day, tired of his solitary position, and with a false shame of his own singularity, he proposed to accompany his wife to the temple.

A colossal image of Baal faced all who entered from the great central portico of the building. It was of gold, and to kiss its foot, which on its huge pedestals just reached the level of the ordinary worshipper's lips, was an act of supreme homage, as well as acknowledgment of Baal as the chief of the deities. As it was an impossibility for every individual entering to perform this act, the sign of the sun, as it was termed, was accepted in lieu of the absolute salute. This consisted of touch-

ing with the finger the right cheek for the rising and the left cheek for the setting sun, and pressing the lips on the palm of the hand.

Jezebel laid her hand on her husband's arm ere they entered and said, "If thou fearest to make the customary obeisance to my god, enter not his presence, but await my return beneath the portico."

"I do not fear," he replied, a red flush mounting to the roots of his hair as he moved forward.

She led him by the hand to the foot of the image, and made the sign of the sun as she cried "All hail, great Baal!" Azalim was about to follow her example when Jezebel imperiously motioned to him to kneel and kiss the idol's foot; scarcely realizing what he did, he obeyed the indication, and as he rose, cried with her as she again repeated "All hail, great Baal!"

So the die was cast and Azalim, the apostate, stood before the idol as the openly acknowledged worshipper of Baal. His knee had bowed to him, and with all the bigot zeal of the convert, the renegade Nazarite even exceeded his young wife in his adoration of the Syrian god.

It was curious that, as Azalim warmed, Jezebel cooled in the worship. After the first novelty and excitement were over, and she had succeeded in the perversion of her husband, she awoke to a great

and bitter disappointment by the discovery of her own non-importance as the daughter of Baal's great high priest.

A king without a queen is but half a king. The pomp and pageantry of his royal state is but a poor show in default of a consort. But a priest has no room on his sacerdotal throne for a priestess. The Salic law is embroidered in large type upon the canopy over it, and no shadow of priestly dignity falls upon feminine members of his family. It would send a social, if not a religious, shock through Christendom if a woman were to do the honours of the Vatican, still less to assist at the solemnities of St. Peter, save as a spectator or private worshipper. The priest must be enthroned *alone*.

When Jezebel clearly realized this fact her disappointment and mortification knew no bounds. She had expected, if not exactly to share her father's honours, at least to live in the reflection of his glory. Why, even in Damascus, she was of more consequence than here, where her father was supreme over every living man, while the priest's daughter was — the priest's daughter — that was all.

An incident occurred which brought this unimportance before her with intolerable mortification.

The chief ceremony of the temple took place at midnight, when the great invocation to Baal to re-

turn again and gladden the earth was made. The high priest, clad in robes as gorgeous as the looms of Damascus could produce, of the richest dyes and finest embroidery, covered with precious stones, was borne aloft on the shoulders of priests, also robed in the richest vestments, through the temple, whilst the thousands upon thousands of people drowned the music of the bands and the voices of the singers, in their shouts of "All hail, great Baal. Hail to Ethbaal, his vice-regent upon the earth," as they carried the latter to the great altar, and, enthroning him above it, began their horrid rites of cutting and wounding themselves, each vying with the other in the depth of the incision and the excess of the sacrificial flow. The scene in the temple at this climax was little short of demoniacal. Like tigers enraged by the sight and smell of blood, the thronging crowds leapt and cried and even gashed themselves in imitation of the priests. The hubbub was especially frantic around the altars of the minor gods, where the songs and dances of the women were changed into the shrieks and gestures of intoxicated bacchantes.

At a short distance from the entrance to one of these places, Azalim and Jezebel were pouring a libation to a stone image of Baal in mutual offering, — for sometimes even to excess in wine the broken

vow of the Nazarite was added to Azalim's apostasy, — and Jezebel was raising the cup to her lips, when one of the roughs who abound in all mobs, as if suddenly perceiving her extraordinary beauty, declared she should share the libation with him, as she must be the goddess Ashtaroth herself, and no Israelitish dog should be honoured by such partnership.

In response to this compliment Azalim struck the speaker to the ground. Immediately the crowd closed upon him and Jezebel. Knives were drawn and loud threats were uttered against the young Hebrew, who was now in deadly danger of a tortured death.

“On with thy veil, beloved,” he whispered to Jezebel. She had removed it because of the intense heat, and the remarks on her beauty which reached his ears alarmed him more than his own danger; as he spoke he sprang upon a ledge of the idol's pedestal, and, assisting her to reach it, placed her behind him and drew a sharp Damascene blade from his side to defend them from the fury of the people.

These tumults were almost a usual part of the midnight orgies of Baal. Although torches blazed everywhere, the area of the temple was so enormous a semidarkness was inevitable, which naturally

lent impunity to disorder. Ethbaal's soldier-guards were stationed at intervals, but they could not be everywhere at once, and Azalim was already severely wounded, when a voice from the thronging crowd cried out, "Back, ye evil dogs, the woman ye dare to covet is the daughter of the great high priest, the vice-regent of the sun-god. Beware how ye hurt what belongs to him."

"The daughter of the high priest, what of that?" was the jeering answer. "We shall be told that his ox and his ass, his camel and his goat, are sacred because belonging to him. Bring the priest's ass and set his daughter on it and we will cry, 'Great is Ethbaal, greater his daughter, and greatest his ass.'"

For the voice of the multitude, whether mob or noble, is ever a fickle one, ready to shout "aves" with one breath and "death" with the next.

Azalim had struck several of the assailants to the ground, but he would soon have been overpowered and Jezebel thrown with the women of the groves, had not a body of the high priest's guards, guided by the uproar, arrived on the spot and dispersed the rioters. They conducted Jezebel to the nearest portico where camels were waiting to be hired, and escorted by Azalim, she safely reached home.

She had behaved throughout with her accustomed courage and presence of mind. She did not speak one word in reply to her husband's questions, and dismissed him at the door of her chamber with an imperious gesture.

Her wrath and humiliation exceeded the bounds of her power of self-control. Through the night she sat brooding, and in the morning, when her father paid her his accustomed visit, she made no allusion to the events of the past night, but abruptly inquired:

"Father, wouldst thou rather be a priest or a king?"

Ethbaal paused, then rose and closed the door behind the curtain. "A king, my child. I am weary of the priesthood, its narrowness, its sameness. The priest is as one apart from his fellows. They are only his tools or his followers. Yes, daughter, I would rather be a king. To dominate still, yea—but to rule my kind, not separate from them. The priest and the people can no more mix than can oil and water."

"And I, father, would rather be a king's than a priest's daughter," returned Jezebel.

"The gods have decreed otherwise," said Ethbaal, with something like a sigh, "and we cannot reverse

their decrees," and then the priest hastily left the apartment.

"So do the gods to me and more also if I do not make them reverse their decrees," was Jezebel's resolve spoken aloud to herself.

Jezebel possessed the clear hardness of brain, the fearless courage, iron will, fixity of purpose, and boundless ambition which belong to a man of the highest order. She also had the vanity, selfishness, cruelty, love of power, and sensuality of temperament, which is very common to human nature and is shared by both sexes. But she owned these evil qualities, not in the weaker proportion given to women, but with all the passion and force of a man of low moral control and calibre; and, as if to complete her error, Nature had encased these qualities in the folds of a magnificent and surpassing beauty as though to enable her to work mischief without end in the world around her.

For awhile after the occurrence in the temple, Jezebel raged and planned, but a reality in her life pressed so closely upon her consideration that these imaginary schemes fell into the background. She was about to become a mother, and if this event were not kept secret she knew that the lives of Azalim and herself would not survive the discovery a single day. She therefore affected ill

health and obtained permission from her father to take the remedy of a change to Damascus, where, under the charge of a lady known to Ethbaal, she could reside for awhile. The priest, in full confidence, left the arrangements to his daughter, who, with the assistance of Neroa and her mother, was safely domiciled in privacy, where, in due time, she gave birth to a child.

She was not without the maternal instinct which humanity shares with the beasts of the field and the nesting mother for their young. She smiled fondly at the little creature the midwife laid in her bosom, and whispered softly to it as its cheek touched hers: "I am glad thou art a woman child, poor babe, for my first man child must be the son of a king, and born to be a king himself."

Azalim, whose love of offspring amounted to a passion, fell into a state of rapture at his new paternal dignity. What mattered a *son* to him who owned not land enough to set his foot upon, nor a head or hoof of cattle he could call his own. Besides, the loves of his life, with the exception of Elijah, had all been women. Salome, Zillah, Jezebel. Yes, he told himself, his little daughter was the most precious gift his new gods could have bestowed upon him.

Jezebel's superb physique soon recovered from

the birth of her child, and in a short time she returned to Baalbec accompanied by Azalim and the younger witch, Neroa, who had decided to leave Damascus and join the brotherhood of the wizards at the Great Temple, and in secret, from fear of her father, Jezebel also sought admission into the dark society.

“I have defied the gods to thwart me,” she said to herself, “and now it shall go ill with me if I do not wrest my wishes from the unwilling hand of Beelzebub himself,” and so with an undaunted spirit she went through all the gruesome arts and repulsive rites of the hellish cult which were carried on in the subterranean halls of the Baalbec temple.

CHAPTER XI.

MOLOCH

OF all the trials and troubles which beset mortality, disappointment leaves the sharpest and most lasting sting behind it, for it always stays humanity's invaluable treasure — Hope.

The disappointment of Jezebel's expectation of distinction and power as the daughter of the powerful high priest effected a complete change in her life and nature. On her return to Baalbec after the birth of her child, she no longer devoted her time to the worship of Baal in the temple, but passed her nights in subterranean vaults where the enlisted slaves of Beelzebub, — as the prince of the demons was then named, — the wizards, and the witches held their unholy rites.

Ethbaal's daughter threw the whole force of her will and the fine gifts of her intellect into the study of the black art which, now popularly judged a shadowy imposture, was then an abstract science. She entered herself a scholar, became a student,

advanced to a professorship, and then obtained rank as member, until the great consummation of the brotherhood was bestowed upon her, — the service and companionship of a familiar spirit whom she could summon into the body of her wolf-dog Moloch, and who bore the same demoniacal name.

For a short while the acquisition of this tremendous power for evil filled the being of Jezebel with an almost fiendish joy, and then there came to her a second disappointment. Gradually she awoke to the fact that witchcraft was not more likely to advance her ambitious hopes than her position as a priest's daughter had been. The wizards, under the names of magicians, soothsayers, or sorcerers, stood before and were in the pay of kings — yes — but they were only hirelings after all, and were never advanced to rank or power, whilst the witches had nothing to look forward to but the money gains paid for casting nativities, divining fortunes, or casting malicious spells and injuries. Of wealth, she had a surfeit. Her father was rich beyond any king around him. To the fortunes of others she was indifferent, only caring for her own; and as to revenge, she needed no diabolic help, she told herself, to return evil with evil.

Jezebel had brooded over wishes of the highest earthly ambition and had sought their fulfilment in

the service of Beelzebub, who, like Baal, seemed about to disappoint her. But she resolved not to give up her hopes without further effort; the first step was to consult Neroa, who was now high in rank among the Baalbec witches.

"Neroa," she said, "when I entered the secret service of Beelzebub, I expected that he would repay me by granting in return the desires of my ambition, but it seems the witch only obtains the wages of hirelings."

"That is all," replied Neroa, in a tone of regret tinged with bitterness. "We enter the service of Beelzebub as we enter the life of the world, with great expectations and find —" she paused.

"And find?" repeated Jezebel.

"That they are rarely, if ever, realized," returned Neroa.

"But mine *shall* be realized," cried Jezebel, imperiously. "Even Beelzebub shall not prevail against my will and wish. Speak, witch, are there no means by which we can induce or force this great prince of darkness to grant, or at least not to oppose, our desires?"

"There are. Yea. There is a way," said Neroa, solemnly, "but the cost is tremendous and the risk is great."

"Name it," exclaimed Jezebel, impatiently.

"The price must be high that I would not pay, the risk great that I would not run, to gain the wishes of my heart." Then as Neroa did not answer, she added, "What doth Beelzebub require?"

"Thy soul," responded the witch, covering her face with her hands as she spoke.

"My soul! and what is that, O witch?"

"Thy life, daughter of Ethbaal, in the indwelling of which thy body moves and breathes and acts, and which will live when thy body and thy mind lie dead in the dust."

"The prince is welcome to it, then," replied Jezebel, scornfully. "I only prize the soul while it revivifies the body through whose senses alone it can enjoy life. Now tell me the risk."

"The risk," explained Neroa, "is that the prince may not keep his word whilst holding thee to thine."

"That is a grave risk indeed, O Neroa, but setting it aside, answer me truly: if the life, as thou call'st the soul, is given to the prince when it leaves the body, does it become one of his familiar imps? If so," she added, in a tone of levity, "the bargain would exactly suit me."

"Oh, do not speak like that," said Neroa, shuddering and turning deadly pale. "Thou knowest not what thou sayest. I will answer thee this one question, but not another. No, thy bartered soul would

not become a demon imp. It would be delivered to the tormentors, for the prince hates our race, because it was formed to take his place in that kingdom whence he was once expelled. O daughter of Ethbaal, beware! beware! and touch not the fire which will consume thee in the handling."

"Nay, Neroa. Thou hast said too much not to speak further. Tell me —"

"Not one word," replied the witch, "I have spoken too much already. What if the spirits have heard me and reported my treason? Go thou to thy familiar, and if thou art resolved to rush upon thy doom, he will counsel thee," and rushing from the apartment, Neroa left Jezebel to herself.

The latter was awed and indeed alarmed by the manner even more than the conversation of the older witch, and, sinking down upon a pile of cushions on the floor, she remained for some time in a state of perplexed anxiety; but Jezebel was not of a temperament to be long turned aside from any project on which she had set her mind, and after awhile she recovered from the consternation with which Neroa had inspired her, and resumed her intention to make terms with her master, the prince of the spirits of the dark world.

Descending to the cell which served as a kennel for her dog Moloch, with a firm hand and firmer

voice she performed the incantations and invocations which summoned her familiar. Like the genii of Eastern story, the dark spirit appeared before her, not in a form of his own or in any individual appearance, but by entering the body of the dog, who, with a low whine as of pain, placed his fore paws upon his mistress's knee and his head against her shoulder, whilst the familiar within him conversed in what will here be rendered into human language.

"Moloch," Jezebel began, "doth not our master Beelzebub reward his servants with something more than the mere silver and gold which some of them already possess?"

"The prince," was the ambiguous reply, "only gives as man gives, for an equivalent."

"Name the equivalent, O spirit," she demanded.

"First name thy desires!"

"I desire to be the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, the mother of kings. I desire power, dominion, fame, with health and wealth and beauty continued to me, with joy, success, and pleasure — in a word, all the good things of this world surrounding me like the atmosphere — all this I desire until my life's end!"

"The prince doth not undo the past!" was the familiar's reply. "Thou art the daughter of a

priest, the wife of a herdsman, and the mother of a woman child put to nurse at a peasant's bosom. Thy beauty is bound to fade, thy health to decay. Thy wealth will pass with thy father's life, and power, joy, and pleasure, even if thou couldst grasp them, will never last. Thou askest impossibilities, O child of earth!"

"Moloch," exclaimed Jezebel as she rose, and with an angry gesture thrust away the dog's paws from her lap, "if ever again thou speakest of impossibilities, I will brand thy name with a curse at the assembly of the brotherhood. Now depart and bear the message of my desires to thy prince and my master Beelzebub, and bring me the answer of his price for them when I summon thee at this time and place on the morrow. Go."

Moloch fell crouching to the ground, uttering a hoarse, savage howl. Jezebel chained him to a ring in the wall and called a slave, who placed water and a platter of bones before him, and then his mistress locked the door behind her and went her way.

At the appointed time, the same scene was repeated, and the familiar said:

"The prince hath the power as thou saidst, O daughter of earth, to grant all thy desires, but thou must in return pay his price!"

"What is the price?" inquired Jezebel.

"If he gives thee for thy life all the good things of it which he hath the power to bestow on whom he pleases, thou must give him, both here and hereafter, that life of thine which is in thy power to give to whom thou choosest."

"What is that life?"

"It is thy soul."

"Ay, so Neroa said. Hath this soul, O spirit, senses like the body? Can it eat and drink and sleep and play? Can it laugh, dance, sing, and love as humanity loves? Hath it bodily eyes and ears and smell? Can it value fine garments and costly treasures, pomp and palaces, precious gems and countless gold and silver? Can it understand and enjoy all these things?"

"It cannot."

"What then can it do?"

"It can feel."

"Feel without senses! What can it feel?"

"It can feel inexpressible joy or unutterable woe."

"What else can it do?"

"It can sin."

"Sin! What is sin?" demanded Jezebel, jestingly.

"Whatsoever thou lusteth to do which a voice

within thy breast forbids," was the familiar's answer.

"And what I lust to do, I will do," responded Jezebel, "although a thousand voices within me forbade it, and if that be sin, I will drink it not in little sips, but in one long deep draught of pleasure and of joy. Go, tell thy lord that Jezebel agrees to the barter, and will, after the manner of her mortal race, sign and seal the agreement where and when he chooses to appoint — yet," she added, "stay. I have been told that the prince does not keep his word with mortals, whilst holding them to theirs. Tell him," she continued, rearing her queenly head and superb form with haughty defiance, "that if he breaks his covenant, I, on my part, will fail in mine. Let this be well understood, thou slave of the black brotherhood, and forget not that I am thy master, although my spirit is clothed in the form of a woman of my race."

"Master," replied the familiar, "I will do thy bidding, and bring thee back thy message."

CHAPTER XII.

SAMECH

JEZEBEL was alone with her dog and her familiar, awaiting the message from her master Beelzebub. As usual, Moloch placed his forepaws on her knee and his head against her shoulder, and in the spirit converse the familiar said :

“ My prince will keep his word with thee as men keep theirs with their fellows, that is — if it serves his own purpose to do so.”

“ How shall I know what serves his purpose ? ” Jezebel questioned.

“ It lies entirely with thyself,” replied the familiar. “ If thou wilt do his bidding during thy mortal life, he will grant all thy desires.”

“ I thought I was to barter my soul in exchange for my wishes,” said Jezebel.

“ Thy allegiance in this life will suffice,” replied the familiar. “ The rest will certainly follow it.”

“ Then it is his,” returned Jezebel, unhesitatingly. “ Return to thy prince, O spirit, and present to

him my allegiance, and I again repeat, I will yield and ratify it after the manner of my race, at any time and place he may appoint."

"I hear and obey, O master," was the reply, and then Jezebel and the dog were left alone together.

The priest's daughter retired to rest as usual; about midnight she awoke to find herself standing in a kind of semidarkness, through which she gazed as though a misty veil had been drawn over her eyes.

Gradually her sight cleared and she found herself dressed as in her waking hours, standing in a barren valley, lined to about the stature of a man with smooth stones covered with carvings and inscriptions, whilst scattered unevenly over the ground were stones also cut with strange letters and signs. The place was evidently an ancient burial-ground, for here and there lay disjointed human bones. When Jezebel approached and looked through the opening, afforded by a stone partly fallen from the wall, she saw a group of skeletons who appeared to be holding a conference together; even her stout heart quailed when, to her excited fancy, they seemed to gibber and mock at her as she gazed, and she fled from the spot. There appeared to be

no exit from this weird enclosure. The rocks were inaccessible and the air was as dense and unbreathable as though the continued presence of the dead had checked its circulation.

The sense of loneliness was terrible. Jezebel felt as if sound as well as atmosphere had been annihilated, and in the midst of her perturbation, she scarcely knew whether it was a terror or relief when she perceived a figure emerge from behind one of the cliffs, and slowly, almost imperceptibly, glide toward her, but she soon recovered her self-possession. The apparitions of the lower spirit world had no alarms for her, and when the spectre stopped before her, she calmly stood her ground and observed it.

The apparition was of almost gigantic stature and was covered with a shining mantle which fell in soft folds over it, but did not conceal the perfect skeleton beneath, gleaming with the yellowy tint and polish of old ivory.

She perceived it was the frame of one in the prime of life, for it is a strange fact that the well preserved human skull can retain not only the indication of age, but the expression of the moral disposition and intellectual capacity of its once living owner.

Scarcely had she noted this, when the spectre thus addressed her:

"Thou hast come then, O daughter of earth!"

"Am I then expected?" she replied, calmly. Converse with a spirit by no means disconcerted her.

"Ay, thou didst demand an audience with the prince, and he hath appointed it in the place of doom."

"Why a place of doom?" inquired Jezebel.

"It is the burial-ground of the men drowned in the great deluge. Hast thou never heard of that great flood?"

"Yea. I have been told that hundreds of ages past the earth overflowed with water. But how could drowned men be gathered from the deep and buried among the mountains of the land? Thou speakest in riddles, spirit," continued Jezebel, mockingly.

"Woman," returned the spectre, "I can tell thee, if thou wilt listen to my tale of this dread deluge."

"And who art thou?" she questioned, "and what is the reason of thy desiring to relate a story of long-forgotten events to me, who care not for them?"

"I am Samech," he replied, "a prisoner of Hades, sent by my jailer to watch thee here and

guard lest thou escape ere thou hast completed thy compact of ruin with the prince, and lo! a higher power forces me to warn thee of thy folly, and therefore I would relate to thee the story of my own self-destruction."

"I need no warning," returned Jezebel, haughtily.

"Which proves thy blindness and thy danger," answered the spectre.

"Well, speak," she assented, seating herself on one of the raised tombs. "At least, it will while away the time until the prince receives me."

"My name, as I have just told thee, was Samech," said the phantom. "I lived in the earlier ages of the world and was of the race of the sons of the great God who made it. In my youth I served this God, and with my brother Noah was high in his favour, but the prince of evil, whom thou art, O daughter of earth, about to serve, had marked me for his own, and prepared a temptation into which I fell. There were then other races on earth called the sons of men, and the women of these people were wondrous fair; I, who was a lover of pleasure, became enslaved by these women and took wives of all I fancied, and brought them to my tents. Under their influence I forsook the great God who was my father, ceased to sacrifice and supplicate

him, and withdrew entirely from the society of my brother, who sought to reclaim me."

"But what has all this to do with the great flood!" interrupted Jezebel, impatiently.

"Thou shalt hear. In time sons were born to me; giants they were, men of renown, and with them I began a life of robbery and violence. If we saw a fair woman or goodly raiment, or flocks and herds belonging to other men, we armed ourselves, and falling on the owners, being stronger than they, slew and took possession of their coveted goods. Then we would return to our tents, and in feasting and excess of wine enjoy our spoils.

"My brother Noah reproved me. He was a husbandman, and lived with the one wife ordained by his God; and his three sons were likewise men of peace, and led upright lives like himself. I, who tired of any woman in a moon or two, ridiculed and threw contempt at them because they were contented and faithful to their wives, whom I often coveted, but never dared seize. One day Noah came to me and said:

"'Brother, the Lord God hath ordered me to build a mighty boat, with a house three stories high upon it, for he is wroth with the universal violence and sin among mankind, and intends to

drown every living creature that is not sheltered in this big ark.'"

"What a fool thou must have thought him, spirit," observed Jezebel scornfully.

"Thou art right, I thought *he* was a fool then, and I know now that *I* was the fool, to my eternal cost," replied the spectre. "My brother implored me to give up my ways of murder, sensuality, and robbery, and turn to the Lord God whose son I had once been; but I grew angry, my wives came out of their tents and mocked him, and my giant sons threatened him, so he went away sorrowfully."

"Did he actually build this big ship?" queried Jezebel, who was getting interested in the story.

"He did. Hundreds of workmen assisted in the strange erection, and it was remarkable that my brother, although not a rich man, never lacked means to pay them. His fields brought forth an hundredfold. The flocks and herds, which he only kept for his own family, now seemed to bring forth thousands and sufficed to pay the wages of the workers. Six days of each week they laboured under his supervision, mocking him behind his back, but servilely obeying all orders to his face. On the seventh day, according to the law of his God, the work ceased, and then he preached to all who would listen to him and prayed them to amend their lives,

obtain mercy and enter into the ark. The people listened and laughed, and not one, no, not one, heeded his words.

“I and my sons were returning from one of our raids of murder and robbery, when, on approaching our tents, we heard a tumultuous noise as of a multitude in great excitement. We followed the sound, and then beheld an extraordinary sight. The building of the ark was finished, and lo! in one long procession, as far as the eye could reach, the animal world of every size, sort and description were approaching and entering the ark by a long, wide platform leading up to the great doors. By twos and by sevens, the males and their mates, beasts, reptiles, and insects, from the mighty behemoth to the smallest ant, were there. No one drove, no one directed them. On they came as if it were their feeding-time, and when the last had disappeared within the structure, the winged world of birds flew in pairs and sevens through the great opened window. The people witnessing this wonderful sight shouted and laughed and mocked and wondered; when every living thing had entered, my brother Noah, who, with his wife, his three sons, and their wives, were standing at the foot of the platform, ascended to the door. Then my brother turned and cried with a loud voice: ‘The door

of mercy is still open. Whosoever will flee from the flood of waters coming on the earth, let him ascend and enter before it is too late! ' "

" Did any accept the offer? " said Jezebel, now thoroughly interested.

" Not one! Three times at intervals he repeated it, once calling me by name. An impulse came on me to accept it, but false shame kept me back, for I had said hard things about Noah's folly, and my wives and sons had heard me and I was ashamed and feared to be laughed at. Then Noah gave the order to his sons and they detached the boards of the platform and threw them off the ark, and when they had entered in, the great door was shut without hands.

" Then the conviction came over me that it was too late, and that I had been a fool, but I crushed the misgiving and returned to our tents and spent the day and night in feasting and revelling and counting out our spoils."

" Did the ark float away on dry ground? " Jezebel questioned, sarcastically.

" For seven days it remained stationary," responded Samech. " The sun shone, the flowers smiled back to it, the birds sang, and not one drop of rain fell; the people pointed to the ark and said the inmates were safe enough until they starved to

death. A stupid gibe, for at least a year's food had been stored within it by my brother. On the eighth day three little clouds came up from the west; then a few giant drops of water fell, and immediately a storm was upon us, and for forty days and forty nights, O daughter of earth, it never ceased; the great deep was broken up and the clouds of heaven opened and emptied themselves upon the earth.

"Death was on every side. I, my wives, and my sons went higher and higher as the waters prevailed, carrying what food we could with us, until at last we reached the highest mountain yet unsubmerged. There below us, resting, as it were, upon a sea of smooth oil rather than water, lay the ark, whilst all around the black billows rose and battled in watery fury.

" 'Father,' cried one of my sons, 'let us make rafts and overtake the ark. Peradventure thy brother may open the door and let us in. See, there are trees in abundance to furnish wood, and the cords of our tents can bind the boats together.'

"We did so, and reached the ark. My giant sons stood one on the other's shoulders and hoisted me above them to the level of the window. We all raised a great shout for help, and I called upon my brother by name and implored him to open to us. I vowed from henceforth to lead a just and holy

life, to serve the Lord God and walk in his ways, if he only would now have mercy upon us and save our lives from the dreadful deluge. But none answered, none approached; not a sound reached us from within, and for a day and a night we paddled around the ark, crying out for mercy and admission. At intervals I was lifted to the window, but none replied or made any sign of even noticing our supplication. At last the end came upon us, and our little fleet sank with us all like lead into the depths of the mighty waters!"

"And then," exclaimed Jezebel, in a jeering tone, "what next?"

"Oh, child of man, do not gibe. Thou knowest not what thou doest. My body was drowned and, after the flood, was found and recognized by my brother Noah and his sons, with the other victims of the rafts lying in this hollow of the mountains; here they buried us and raised and inscribed our tombs. But my shuddering soul went into the presence of the Lord God whose laws I had broken and whose mercy I had despised, to be remanded to the prisons of darkness until the great day of trial, when all who ever held mortal life must give in their accounts of the deeds done in the body."

"Thou hast told thy story well, spirit," said Jezebel, "and I am a judge, having listened to the

best recounters in Damascus, but I do not see its purport as regards myself."

"Thou art dull of understanding, woman. Canst thou not perceive that what thou art about to do, I did, and that I am sent in mercy to warn thee by my example? Like thee, I sold myself to Beelzebub, and am accursed for evermore. Oh! take warning by my fate!"

"How do I know that thy story is true?" said Jezebel, "or that there is really another life after this, O spirit?"

"Am not I a proof of it? Can there be stronger evidence than one who is risen thus from the dead?"

"Thou mayest be an impostor, an enemy of the prince, or only an apparition. No, spirit, I am not easily turned from my purpose. If the prince will grant my desires, I will serve him here and" — she paused a moment — "hereafter also, if there is a hereafter!"

"Oh, fool!" exclaimed the phantom. "Thou art like a child bartering a garden of delights for a dish of fair-rinded but rotten fruit. Thy blood be upon thine own head. I have fulfilled my mission and given my message and will say no more!" and slowly and imperceptibly as he had approached, the antediluvian Samech disappeared into his tomb.

Jezebel remained a short while alone in the dark-

ness; then perceived Moloch entering the enclosure in his stealthy currish manner, and knew at once that her familiar was at hand.

"The prince is ready," was his communication, and Jezebel rose and prostrated herself before a faint lurid light at the farther end of the enclosure of rocks.

"Advance," said the familiar, "and write and sign the requests thou desirest of the prince."

Jezebel obeyed. On a flat raised stone an open sheet of parchment lay with a pen and inkhorn beside it. "Write," said the familiar.

"The horn is dry," she answered.

"Thy prophets shed their blood for Baal. Hast thou none of thine own for the prince?"

Without a moment's hesitation the dauntless woman produced a knife from her girdle, pierced a vein above her wrist and, holding it over the inkhorn, filled it with her blood, then taking a linen girdle from her garments, she bound up the wounded arm, and wrote as follows upon the parchment before her:

"I, Jezebel, daughter of Baal's high priest, ask of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons, to whom is committed the gifts of this earth, to grant me to be the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, the mother of kings. I beg him to continue to me the

health and wealth, the beauty and powers of mind I now possess. I petition him to bestow upon me unbounded power and unlimited pleasures, pomp, luxury and joy. All women shall envy me and all men shall render me homage, and every good the world can give, and every prosperity the prince can offer shall be mine, with the pledge of a long life in which to enjoy these things —” she raised her pen and stopped writing.

“What wilt thou pay for these good things?” suggested the familiar. “Write thine offer of exchange.”

“I will give the prince the services of this, my present life, and the disposal of the next, if there is a next!”

There was a pause, and then the familiar said:

“It suffices. The prince accepts thy offer and will perform his part of the compact. Sign thy name.”

In bold, decided characters she wrote it, and then the document seemed to be snatched away and another rolled up and sealed was substituted in its place.

“Take it. It is the prince’s promise,” said the familiar. “Nay,” as Jezebel was about to open it, “there is no time to read it. We must depart.”

“Nay, I entreat, I implore,” cried Jezebel, “that

the prince 'reveal himself to me in bodily presence, if it is only for a moment. Obtain this favour, I beg of thee, Moloch.'

There was a sudden blaze of light, and a form stood for an instant before her of such wondrous grandeur and majesty that she covered her face with her hands, overwhelmed with the sight.

As quickly it vanished, and a face appeared, on the features of which the expression of malignant hate and evil passion was so vivid and repulsive, it revolted even the soul of Jezebel, ready as she was to sell herself to sin. This picture also instantly fell into darkness, and the same face again flashed forth with such a horrible despair imprinted upon it, that Jezebel fell senseless to the ground.

When she recovered, she found herself reclining on a couch in a tent on the slopes of the Lebanon. Neroa, the witch, was seated by her, and outside were camels and attendants in readiness to convey her back to Baalbec when she was sufficiently recovered.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAIA HAJE

WHEN Jezebel opened the document which she had taken in exchange for the compact so solemnly signed with her blood, she found it was an entirely blank sheet of parchment. Not one word or letter, sign or seal was visible on any part of it.

Her indignation knew no bounds; she summoned her familiar, and demanding back her own deed of contract, renounced her allegiance to Beelzebub, and vowed she would become from henceforth his enemy.

“Cease this childish anger,” replied the spirit. “Can the billow overturn the rock against which it beats? and can a creature of dust defy a spirit principality? Thou hast offered thy terms to the prince after the manner of thy kind, and he has consented after his own way. I have told thee before that if it is worth his keeping, thy master will hold to his word. Thy business is to make it worth his keeping. Thou thyself must be the tool, and Beel-

zebub will be the hand that guides thee. Thy first wish is to be the daughter of a king. Thou canst have but one father, and he is a priest. Let thy head be steady, thy hand firm, and thy mind subtle, and he shall be a king. The chance is at hand. Let it not escape thee."

"How shall I seize it?" she asked.

"I will be thy guide," was the answer. "Wait and watch."

So, like a leopard crouching beneath the undergrowth for his prey, Jezebel did wait and watch, a fit match for the wild beast in beauty, cunning and relentless cruelty.

The great temple was cleared and the doors were closed, for Pelez, the King of Tyre, was coming to be cured by the sun-god of a painful disease. The physicians had failed to relieve him, but the priests asserted that if he were anointed with the blood of the prophets shed by themselves upon Baal's altar, he would be restored to his former health, and naturally these rites were to be performed in secret.

In a chamber adjoining a gallery which overlooked the high altar, Jezebel and her great wolf-dog Moloch were awaiting the high priest, who had promised to exhibit himself to his daughter in the new vestments prepared for the royal ceremony,

and also to permit her to stand behind a curtain in the gallery and witness the performance.

He entered, arrayed in robes of gorgeous colouring and the richest embroideries, with a tiara or high crown upon his head set with gems of dazzling brilliancy. It was a question if the grand person of Ethbaal were the more set off by these magnificent vestments, or whether the attire gained in splendour by his fine appearance. "Father," cried Jezebel, enthusiastically, "thou art like a king returning in triumph from the battle."

"Nay, daughter, these garments are fitter clothing for priests and women than for the chariots and horse of the man of war. Give me the helmet and the shield, the sword and the spear, and I will pass over these trappings and stones to thee and thy maidens."

"Father," she whispered, "if the king dies before he returns to Tyre, who will reign in his stead?"

Ethbaal started. A flush of confusion rose to his forehead, as though a suggestion struck him. "He must not die," he said. "He is my guest."

"But if he should? If the chance overtook him, who would be king of Tyre, who lord of Sidon?" she urged, "for he hath only young children."

"It is no business of thine or mine, daughter," was Ethbaal's rebuke. "Cease the vain inquiry."

"But it is a business of thine and mine, for the magicians say that the gods have destined *thee* to be the king if Pelez dies," cried Jezebel, boldly, "so let thy heart be stout and thy hand ready when the time comes to seize their gift."

She turned away, and Ethbaal, without another word, left the chamber.

It was night and the orgy was over; the prophets had wounded themselves, and the king had been anointed with their blood, and was resting in one of the apartments adjoining the temple. The eunuch Gehanan guarded the door and noiselessly paced up and down whilst several soldiers kept watch at a short distance.

A woman closely veiled approached the eunuch, and touching his arm, whispered in his ear: "How fares the king?"

"It is well with him, daughter of Ethbaal," replied Gehanan. "He sleeps, and the physicians say if he can sleep he will do well."

"Then he will recover?" interrupted Jezebel, whom Gehanan had at once recognized by her voice.

"Yea," continued Gehanan, "the physicians say that if he sleeps till morning, he may yet live long enough to see his son grown to an age when he can reign in his stead."

"Baal be praised, who hath so blessed the blood

of his prophets for the cure of the great king," observed Jezebel. "I will come again at dawn, O Gehanan, for my father bade me bring him frequent tidings," and she returned to the room behind the gallery, where Moloch lay crouching and whining on the floor.

She prepared incantations and rites, and, like the genii of Eastern tales, her familiar came and entered into Moloch.

"Hear and advise, O spirit," — she apparently addressed the dog — "Ethbaal protects, and Gehanan guards this man, and I dare not slay him, for the avenging would fall upon my own head."

Moloch approached Jezebel as usual, but there was no answer.

"Thy last message from our lord Beelzebub was that he would only help me if I helped myself. Here is the chance of my becoming the daughter of a king, and I cannot take it. Help me, O my familiar, with thy counsel, and I will follow it."

"There is a company of serpent-charmers from old Egypt near the temple, and they have an asp, the Naia Haje, from its ancient river, whose tooth is painless and makes no sign and leaves no mark. The man's tongue is parched and his throat is dry; he longs for the taste of the purple grape, the sharp red juice of the pomegranate, and the luscious flesh

of the fig. Dost thou understand, daughter of Eth-baal? If so, let me go, for I have work to do elsewhere for the prince."

"Yea, I comprehend thee, O spirit, and need thee no more at the present hour. Go, thou art free." As she spoke, the dog rolled on the floor, uttered a quick cry as if in a pang of parturition, and came whining to the feet of his mistress, who, taking a bone from a dish on a table, flung it on a mat and bade him lie down and be consoled.

It was morning, and Gehanan still guarded the door of the bedchamber of the King of Tyre and Sidon, and the soldiers tramped to and fro before it. Jezebel, closely veiled, and this time followed by an attendant carrying a covered basket, again touched Gehanan's arm, and inquired:

"How fares the king? Is he awake?"

"He is awake and refreshed with his rest," returned the eunuch, "and bade me send his greeting to thy father."

"I bring an offering of flowers and fruit from the high priest," she said, "and am commanded to present it myself to the king and bear back his message."

Gehanan hesitated. He mistrusted Jezebel, and his order had been to admit none besides the physicians to the king's presence.

"Thou need'st not fear," she remarked, coldly, "I do not desire to see him alone. Thou canst accompany me and my servant."

Without further objection, the eunuch opened the door and drew aside the curtain, and the three entered the apartment.

The king lay, a most repulsive object, propped up with cushions upon a couch. Since his bath of blood he had neither been washed nor tended, and the red liquid had dried upon him; with his matted hair, swollen eyes, and haggard features, he resembled a maniac rather than a sane man. Jezebel took the basket from the attendant's hand, and made a low obeisance before the king, as she said:

"I am Jezebel, the daughter of Baal's high priest, and I bring an offering to thee, O king, of fruit and flowers, to refresh thee in this thine hour of weakness."

"I thank the high priest, and would that thou unveiledst thy face, that I may look upon and thank thee also."

She at once complied with his request.

"Thou art very fair," he said, "and worthy of being a queen thyself. I would that the mother of my son had not already filled the place, and that I can only ask thee of thy father as the chief of my concubines."

“That honour is too great for me, O king!” replied Jezebel, darting on him a glance from her serpentine eyes which he fortunately did not observe, “but I will not intrude longer on thy patience. These flowers will refresh thee, the fruit is choice and will allay thy thirst. I will place the basket by the side of thy couch, within reach of thy hand, O king!” She removed the cover and drew a small table close to the side of the king, on which she laid the basket containing the richest, rarest fruits and exquisite flowers. Then bending low, she kissed the uncovered foot of the king and left the apartment.

The hours passed, and the noonday heat came, but all was still in the royal bedchamber. “The king sleeps long,” said Gehanan to the visiting physician, who went away, saying, “We will not disturb him. If he sleeps he will do well.”

After awhile, a misgiving came to the eunuch; he stole quietly into the chamber, and at once, to his horror, perceived that the sleep was that of death.

Calm, quiet, peaceful, without sign of pain or struggle, lay the body of the king in the last awful sleep of mortality. It needed no second glance to tell the eunuch this, nor a second thought to realize

the danger to his master Ethbaal, and, consequently, to himself.

Pelez had journeyed in royal state to Baalbec with chariots and horses, soldiers and attendants, and all this train had been located in the city, while their royal master gave himself alone into the care of the high priest and his prophets, in order that Baal might perform the miracle of his cure more completely.

Gehanan did not lose his self-command. He at once examined the lifeless form, but found no marks of violence upon it. Then he sought explanation amongst the medicines and drinks provided; nothing had been moved or tampered with. He could not solve the mystery.

He left the room, bolted the door, and hastened to Ethbaal. "Great priest," he whispered, "the king is dead! The gods must have smitten him. Come and behold the ruin."

Ethbaal gazed upon the royal corpse in silence for some moments. Then, turning to the eunuch, he said, sternly:

"Thou hast betrayed thy trust, and shalt surely die. Who hath entered here?"

"I have not betrayed my trust, master," replied Gehanan, earnestly, "not a living soul hath entered this chamber but the physician and myself—

save," he corrected himself, "thy daughter Jezebel, who came with a message from thee to Pelez, and I was present with her whilst with the king."

"I did not send her, I gave no message," said Ethbaal.

"She brought that basket of flowers and fruit as from thee, O master, and the king was pleased with her beauty, and said he would ask her from thee to be the chief of his concubines."

Ethbaal raised a spray of lilies, already fading, from the basket as he suggested. "Perhaps the fruit was poisoned. Let us examine it, Gehanan." Then, with a cry of "'Tis the Naia Haje," he started back. The eunuch, rushing forward, saw the flat head and forked tongue of the fatal Egyptian asp. Disturbed by the removal of the lilies, it was loosening its coils for a fatal spring, when, with admirable dexterity, Gehanan drew a sharp Damascus blade from his girdle, and struck off the reptile's head, which fell with its writhing body among the fruit and flowers.

The cause of the mischief was clear enough. The fruit had been disarranged by the royal hand, which had thus received the fatal poison from the tooth of the Naia Haje. The priest lifted the wrist of the corpse, and there saw a slight, almost in-

visible, red spot, which, save under close inspection, would pass undetected.

"Bring my daughter here, and give me that knife, eunuch," said Ethbaal, sternly. "She hath wrought my ruin, and, as surely as Baal shines in the heavens, my hand shall slay her as thine hath done this serpent. Ay, although she is the child of her I still love and for whom I still grieve."

As he was speaking, Jezebel entered the chamber attired like a princess, and more superb in beauty and imperious in bearing than usual. There was a triumphant gleam in her eyes, a scornful, satisfied curl on her lip, that ill became the expectant victim of her father's wrath.

"Hail to thee, King of Tyre and Sidon," she cried, bending her head and bowing the knee before him. "There lies the dead king. Here stands the living one."

"Cease this raving, woman," exclaimed Ethbaal, in violent anger. "Thou hast brought ruin and death upon me by this crime," pointing to the basket, "and shalt share the doom of him thou hast slain."

"Cease thy folly, rather, father," cried his daughter. "Thou wert too great a craven to commit the crime. Do not be too great a fool to profit by it."

"Profit by it," repeated the priest. "I shall be torn in pieces by the Sidonians when they are informed of the king's death."

"Why need they know? Call in the physician and his assistant. They can be trusted, and sufficiently bribed. Wash and paint and clothe the dead king in his royal robes. Place him in his chariot, and take him back as he came, to Tyre. Give out that the king is sick. Govern thou in his name until thou art established, and lo! then Pelez shall die, and Ethbaal shall reign in his stead."

"In the name of Baal, O master, thy daughter speaketh wisely," said Gehanan. "There is no other chance of escape."

"There is none other," said Jezebel, stroking the head of Moloch, who followed at her heels. "Thou hast confessed, O my father, thou wouldst prefer the kingly to the priestly office, and my lord Beelzebub, the prince of the demons, hath destined me to be a king's daughter."

All was carried out as Jezebel had suggested. A proclamation was made through the streets of Baalbec that the sun-god had cured the king, who would at once return to Tyre. A couch, with a close canopy, was prepared in his chariot, and, when the royal train reached the capital, it passed

in triumphal procession through its streets; the next day a herald announced at the doors of the temples, at the gates, and in the market-places, that until the king's perfect recovery, Ethbaal, the high priest of Baalbec, should administer his kingly power.

One day the news ran through the city, "The king is dead." Ere the inhabitants had recovered from their surprise, the tidings followed that Ethbaal was king in his place. There were none to contest his right, for the king's only son was a mere child. There was no time to set up a rival, or an opposition, and so, without riot, discontent, or bloodshed, the high priest exchanged the altar for the throne.

Thus Jezebel gained the first point of her ambition; she was the daughter of a king.

How fared it with Azalim whilst all these changes and intrigues were going on?

The reversal of the usual matrimonial routine of the sexes happened in the relations of Azalim and Jezebel. The security and possession of marriage, which is generally apt to moderate, if not to cool love in the man's nature, has the contrary effect of increasing the affections in the woman. But, with Jezebel, the wild passion that led her to recklessly throw away her future, through her imprudent

marriage, died away after the birth of her child, as suddenly as it had come into existence, whilst with Azalim, his attachment, nay, rather his infatuation, for his wife increased a hundred fold. No bad humour or tyrannical caprice on her part estranged him, nor did absence lessen, nor separation destroy the intensity of his love. Like a spaniel to his master, a soldier to his general, a parent to his spoilt child, the greater the severity, exaction, and ingratitude on the one part, the stronger and more complete was the devotion on the other.

When Jezebel's compact with the evil one had opened to her future such great and boundless dreams of ambition, her indifference to Azalim gradually grew to aversion, and then to hate. When she became a Sidonian princess, for Ethbaal, being a Sidonian, held his chief court and residence in Sidon, all her thoughts and energies were turned into schemes to get rid of him. She had hinted at divorcement, but Azalim had so resolutely refused to consider the proposal, urging the impossibility of his parting from her, and also his vow to the prophet never to dissolve the marriage save by the hand of death, that she set this idea aside as hopeless.

He had insisted on retaining his post in her father's household, and fearing he would reveal the

truth, she had consented to his wish. The child had been put away to nurse, the mother not even affecting any interest in it, whilst the father regarded it with passionate parental affection, and marked its little shoulder with the name of Astarté, after the fashion of sailors and herdsmen. His love for this child was the mingled protection of a father, and the tenderness of a mother.

Having failed in her proposal of separation, Jezebel tried to inspire him with a desire for liberty, and an appeal to his patriotism and love of country. She would obtain his freedom, she said, or give him gold and silver sufficient to purchase cattle and land, so that he might hold his own amongst the elders of Israel. But Azalim was hurt by her proposals, and told her lovingly that her country was his country, her presence his chief joy, her affection his supreme happiness. She was a princess now; he knew it too well — yet he was her husband, and he would never leave her, content, for the love he bore her, to be her willing slave and faithful servant.

Jezebel was not all evil. Bad as she was now, and worse as she afterward became, she yet retained a remnant of the godlike nature breathed into the image of moistened dust when man became a living soul. She was touched by her hus-

band's passionate protestation, his devoted constancy, so different from the selfish, passing lusts of the men of pleasure and sensuality with whom she mixed, and she checked the deadly purpose of death which had entered her brain. As Azalim threw himself at her feet, and rested his head upon her knees, she caressed and kissed him, and told him he was worth more than a king's crown, or the love of every Syrian man rolled into one; and at the moment, as she gazed down upon the comely features and fine form of her young husband, and listened to his vows of love, she meant what she said.

At the interview of these two lovers, — for in the secrecy of their meetings, the supplicating appeals of the man, and the half-hesitating, half-loving response of the woman, more resembled the uncertain aspirants for love than the assured position of marriage, — a third person had, with eye and ear, silently assisted.

CHAPTER XIV.

APOSTASY

GEHANAN had received large gifts in return for his silence and aid in the death of Pelez, and was appointed to a responsible post at the court of the new king, but here his reward ceased. He was deeply disappointed, having hoped to be included in the government of the state, and the conviction that he owed this neglect to the Princess Jezebel did not lessen the antagonism he entertained toward her.

He had, in fact, reason for this surmise. Jezebel did not forget, and certainly she did not forgive, the barriers which the eunuch's vigilance had placed between herself and liberty and pleasure in Damascus. Since her crime and her counsel had given the thrones of Tyre and Sidon to her father, her influence with him was very great, and she took care that Gehanan should not be in a position to rival her power.

The subtle and mortified eunuch resolved on re-

venge and kept a quiet but close watch upon the princess. The good understanding existing between her and the Hebrew captive had not escaped him, and he made up his mind to discover the foundation of this easy familiarity. The step of Gehanan was as noiseless as the tread of a wildcat. The hunted hare was not quicker of ear; the eye of the eagle was scarce keener of sight, than his. The slaves declared that whispers in the eaves of the house were heard by the eunuch on the housetop, and a theft committed in the dark on one side of a wall was witnessed by him on the other. Now these sharp senses were put to a watch to find out the secrets of the princess and the slave.

They were lovers, he soon divined. But what of that? Since she escaped his guardianship, Jezebel had many lovers, — favoured to-day, dismissed to-morrow. There must be more than this in their intimate intercourse.

Every room in the Sidonian palace communicated with another, ranging in one long chain throughout its extent; behind the embroidered curtains of one of the doors of the chamber in which Azalim and Jezebel held the converse just related, Gehanan crouched and heard the revelation which he foresaw would place Ethbaal's daughter in his power, and which he hoped would render her a pliant tool in

his hands. "I will bide my time," he said to himself, as he stole away, "and when thy sky is bluest and thy path most flowery, I will launch my thunderbolt and trip up thy feet, thou proud daughter of an ungrateful priest."

Truly, it was a valuable discovery for the wily eunuch to find his master's daughter was the wife of an Israelite prisoner, who refused to release her from an imprudent marriage.

Confident in the belief that her union with Azalim was known only to him and to herself, Jezebel revolved scheme after scheme in her own mind for the severing of her matrimonial tie. Death, she told herself, would be the surest and simplest solution of the difficulty, but little as she respected human life, the memory of her love for the goodly young Israelite withheld her from this extreme measure. Yet where could she find a safe alternative?

Wiser in her generation than the children of light, she sought counsel from a higher intelligence than her own. She summoned her familiar.

Since the hour when the huge wolf-dog had been dedicated to the service of the prince of the demons, a change had come over the creature's outward nature. Now and then his fierce savagery sprang forth, and he had to be securely chained, lest in his apparent madness he attacked any who came in his

way, but he usually exhibited the mean, cowardly nature of a cur, sneaking abjectly behind his mistress, and falling down insensible for a short while after possession by the familiar.

“Speak, Moloch,” said Jezebel, as the great dog entered her presence. “Thy prince hath made me the daughter of a king, and now I desire to become the wife of a king, and —”

“The consort of the young King of Israel, Ahab,” interrupted the familiar, in the sharp spirit whisper in which he conversed with Jezebel, “but a woman of the earth can have but one husband, and thine lives!”

“True, O spirit, and he refuses to free me. I need my liberty, and have summoned thee to aid and counsel me.”

“Slay him, daughter of earth.”

“That I will not do. Now that we are parting, I find that I love him still. He shall not die, and yet I must be rid of him, for I love to be a queen better than I love him. Direct me, O spirit, by thy wisdom of darkness.”

“Change thine enemy to a friend.”

“My enemy? Who is he?”

“He who crouched behind thy curtain and learnt thy secret, daughter of Ethbaal.”

“Gehanan?” whispered Jezebel.

“Ay, the same. Make him thy tool ere he uses his knowledge against thee. Hast thou any further commands?”

“Nay, I understand. Go.”

Moloch fell to the ground, and Jezebel was left with her own thoughts.

Since her marriage with Azalim, Jezebel had dispensed with the attendance of her Nubian youths, and had substituted for them the services of an Ethiopian, who, after a cruel practice of the times, had undergone the loss of his tongue, thus rendering him incapable of betraying his employer's secrets, whilst still being able to comprehend and obey orders. This man's duty was to remain in attendance outside the doors of the princess's apartments, always ready to do her errands and carry her messages.

A sharp rap or two upon a brazen shield brought him into Jezebel's presence.

“Find Gehanan, and bring him here,” she said.

The signs made by the negro were well understood in the palace, and the eunuch followed him into the presence of the princess, made obeisance before her in his usual sycophantic manner, and desired to know her commands.

Jezebel rose from her seat, and with an inexpressi-

ble haughtiness of look and manner confronted the eunuch, who stood just within the curtain of the door. "My command is that thou repeat to me, word for word, what the listening slave, crouching behind the curtain, heard of the converse that passed between my servant, the young Gileadite, and myself."

For a moment a lie was on Gehanan's lip, but a glance at the angry face of the king's daughter changed his purpose and extorted the truth.

"He heard, princess, that this young Gileadite was thy husband, and refused to put thee away."

The directness of this answer sent a momentary shock through Jezebel, but she quickly recovered, and said, sternly:

"Is it to be war or partnership between us, eunuch?"

"Partnership, great princess," was the prompt reply.

"Partnership be it, but listen to my terms," was her answer. "I will pay thee well for thy share, but the work must be of my appointment and the pay of my apportionment, and the gods do so to me and more also, Gehanan, if thou ever betrayest this my secret."

"I hear, and consent, great princess," said Gehanan.

"Then depart now and await my instructions," said Jezebel, as she waved him away with an imperious gesture.

It happened about this time there was a rumour in Sidon that Ahab, the young King of Israel, was coming to demand of Ethbaal the hand of his daughter Jezebel in marriage. As a matter of course the report reached the ears of Azalim, who straightway rushed into the presence of the princess and demanded to know if the news had any foundation in fact.

"Yes!" she replied. "The King of Israel hath asked me of my father, who naturally desires to give his consent."

Then again the reversal of the matrimonial relations of these two took place, and Azalim, like a neglected wife of a faithless husband, poured out a mingled passion of appeals, reproaches, and even threats, whilst Jezebel, like an unworthy husband, was rather irritated than touched by these remonstrances. Azalim was her husband, but she was now a princess and could ill tolerate reproaches from a Hebrew captive and landless herdsman. She was about to express her displeasure in no mild terms, when a threat from Azalim changed her impulse.

"If thou wilt not devise means, beloved, to avert this marriage, I will go in to thy father and declare

before him and the young Ahab that thou art my wife!"

Jezebel's face paled. She knew the danger, the utter destruction, this step would bring upon her, so she temporized.

"Come here, love of my soul," she whispered, "and lay thy head upon my lap; we will consult together how to evade this union, for I love thee, Azalim, and care not for King Ahab, and prefer poverty with thee to the crown of Israel."

"Yea, beloved," assented Azalim, with fond faith in her, "love in the wilderness is better than thrones without love."

She seated herself on a low divan, and Azalim, at her feet, rested his head upon her knees, whilst she caressed him with her hands, and kissed him with her lips, but had he looked up as she spoke, he might have been less simple, for an expression half scorn, half amusement, passed over the fine, haughty features. Had she indeed sold her soul to the prince for love in the wilderness? Her soul! She did not really believe in the existence of the thing, still less in its worth, but such as it was, she had given it already to be the daughter of a king. She was that, and now it was within her grasp to be the wife of one! Her comely Azalim was indeed a fool! Love in the wilderness!

The look of contempt and ridicule passed away, and as the husband looked up he was dazzled by the increased beauty in his wife's face, for the prospect of her fulfilled ambition had illuminated her features with a great joy. "Jezebel," he cried, "leave me not, or I die."

"Listen to me, husband," she said, gravely. "Thou knowest that above every other wish I desire the honour of our great god Baal, ay, even above my love for thee. Now, if I forego the throne of Israel for thy love, thou, on thy part, must sacrifice something for me!"

"I will do whatsoever thou requirest," cried Azalim, "if thou wilt swear by Baal to reject the King of Israel."

"Agreed. Now thou must go without a day's delay to Dan in Israel, and there procure from the priests of the golden calf the promise that they will exchange its worship for that of Baal, and obtain their oaths, signs, and seals to that effect."

"But they will not listen to so mad a proposal from so mean a messenger," interposed Azalim.

"Hear me to the end, thou simple one. Thou must take money, and promise more. The priests of the calves are needy. Let them name their own price, and it shall be paid, conditional with their consent. Then thou must pass through the length of

the land to Beersheba, to the other calf, and gain the same consent; when thou bearest back the documents, the price shall be given, and I will fly with thee to the wilderness and — and — love!”

“Again I say,” returned Azalim, “swear by Baal thou wilt not wed Ahab.”

“If thou bringest me the abjuration of the calves, yea; and in thy turn swear thou to me by thy God of Israel, that thou wilt never reveal our marriage to any living soul.”

“Nay,” said Azalim, shrinking from the proposed oath. “Let me also swear by Baal!”

“As thou wilt. Come.” She rose, and Azalim followed her to an altar of Baal in the corner of the room curtained into a kind of oratory. Both took the oath, and made the sign of the sun by touching each side of the cheek with the middle finger. Jezebel resumed her position on the divan, and Azalim rested his head again on her lap, and, like Delilah before her, she soothed her slave to sleep.

“Poor fool,” she half sighed, as she made mesmerism passes over his head and face. “I wonder whether any other man will love me as he has loved?”

Azalim rose early the next morning. A strong, swift mule had been provided for him; a mantle and a coat were also prepared. In the lining of the

latter, money was concealed, and in the folds of the former he could, if necessary, disguise himself. Bags were also furnished, filled with food, and thus fully equipped he started on his unholy mission.

When he was fairly on the road, the princess summoned Gehanan and explained to him the errand to the calf of Dan. "Go after him," she said. "Take with thee six picked men of the king's guard, as though on royal service, and keep him in view. As he proceeds on his way to Beersheba, select a solitary place, and then seize and bring him to the king's prison at Syria. But take not his life. I will give thee, Gehanan, many a high sum if thou fulfil my orders, but if he be slain, thou shalt only have a fourth of this reward."

So the eunuch and his men followed on the track of Azalim, who arrived without incident or interruption at the shrine of the molten calf of Dan.

He met with no difficulty with the facile priests. They were selected from the scum of the population, and entered the priesthood of the calves in order to gain a livelihood without labour. It was not a rich religious establishment, and there was little to tempt superior men to enter it. They agreed to the proposals of the document, in return for the promised payment, with the proviso that the new King Ahab did not oppose the change.

With spirits elated at his success, he turned his back on Dan and proceeded on his way to Beersheba, passing the eunuch and his little band, who were disguised, without recognition, and humming a Syrian love-song as he rode. On the second day he found himself entangled among the ways of the vineyards which covered a sunny slope of country lying to the south.

Suddenly he stopped his song, for not thirty feet before him stood the tall, majestic figure of a man who seemed to fill up the narrow path and bar his way. The soul of Azalim turned cold within him. There was no mistaking the leonine head, the stately, hair-clad, leather-girdled form. It was the great prophet Elijah.

The sight of the prophet called Azalim's sins to his remembrance. Oh, that he could fly! But where? There was no turning back, there was no turning aside. There was no passing by. He *must* meet the prophet.

He alighted from the mule, and approaching Elijah, bowed low before him and stammered, "Art thou my lord Elijah?"

"Whence comest and where goest thou, Azalim?" said Elijah, taking no notice of the other's greeting.

"I come from Samaria, and am now returning

thither," replied Azalim, who, in his terror lest Elijah should discover his errand at Dan, lied thus clumsily.

"This is the straight road from Dan," observed the prophet. "Did thy business lie there?"

"No," replied Azalim, taking refuge in this single word of a direct falsehood.

"What carriest thou in thy bosom?" continued Elijah. "Thy mantle and thy coat are wrapped over it as though it were hidden treasure."

"There is naught, my lord, save the wallet that contains the money for my journey. I carry no other treasure!" but as Azalim spoke, his flesh quivered and his voice trembled in a sickening thrill of abject fear. Before his apostasy, truthfulness had been the leading characteristic of Azalim, and he still lied with confusion.

The aspect of the prophet was terrible to behold, his voice was as the trump of doom, as he said:

"Thou hast lied to me these three times. Thy heart hath cleaved to the perverse and rebellious woman. Thy knee hath bowed to Baal and thy lips have kissed his image. Thou hast betrayed thy country and forsaken the Lord God of Israel, and he hath forsaken thee. Depart thou to thy dwelling among the unclean."

The prophet turned away, and Azalim stood shuddering with a nameless terror. What had come to him? The blood seemed turned to fire in his veins, his flesh seemed changed to ice. A gnawing pain seized his bones to their very marrow, and all over his body crept a stinging, irritating sensation, as though he lay on a bed of poisonous and evil insects. What had come to him? His eye fell upon the hand holding the bridle of his mule. It was of the horrible whiteness of unsullied snow. Azalim fell straightway to the ground in an access of unutterable despair, as he groaned: "O God of the fathers of Israel, I am a leper!"

Yea, a leper! Not with the slow beginning of the little scab, when the priest might be justified in giving the sufferer hope of escape, but a leper at the apex of the disease, with every internal organ affected, and every morsel of the external body tainted with its curse. Azalim, the flower of the Israelitish youth, was a loathsome leper.

After a short interval of mental agony, he rose from the ground, threw off his coat and mantle, and cast aside the bag containing the document of the Danite priests and the letters and agreement for those of Beersheba. With naught belonging to him save his tunic and shoes, he rushed from the vine-

yards whither he knew not, uttering from time to time the dismal cry: "Unclean, Unclean!"

Not long after he disappeared, two men, half beggars, half thieves, arrived at the spot. They rushed upon the discarded garments, and soon discovered the money concealed in the coat; in the dividing of this, they quarrelled so angrily that the dispute came to blows, then to bloodshed, and ended in the weaker being slain. The victor gathered the coins, wrapped the corpse in the mantle, tied the bag and its papers around its neck, and made off without detection.

Gehanan and his band traced Azalim into the vineyard, but like him lost themselves among the narrow walled paths and high fences, and it was night ere they reached the place where the murdered man lay. His face, as well as form, had been so battered in the struggle that in the uncertain light the eunuch did not detect the difference of appearance, and recognizing the coat and mantle, and finding the money gone, and the papers untouched, he naturally concluded that the young Israelite had fallen a victim to robbery and murder.

"Great Baal!" he cried in dismay. "This mishap has cut off our reward to a fourth!"

The eunuch bent over the body, withdrew the mantle and coat, still containing the documents con-

cerning Dan and Beersheba, in order to give the princess proof of his story, and placing these garments on the mule, returned with his men, in all haste, to Tyre.

CHAPTER XV.

GIVEN IN MARRIAGE

WHEN Gehanan brought the news of the assassination of Azalim to the Princess Jezebel, she received it with a burst of regret for the dead and reproaches to the bearer of the tidings, whom she accused of having proved unworthy of his charge. And she gave him only a fourth of the promised reward.

Jezebel was sincere in her sorrow for the loss of her young husband. It was her first love, and perhaps the only real one of her long and selfish life. But worldly thoughts are great consolers, and as time passed, the proud ambitious princess judged it had happened for the best, after all, that this serious obstacle had been removed from her path.

Jezebel's beauty had only received local celebrity when she occupied the unimportant position of a priest's daughter, but now she received a far wider renown. Very little comeliness suffices for the reputation of a princess's beauty. Ethbaal had not long ascended the throne of Tyre and

Sidon ere the fame of Jezebel's charms had spread over Asia, and the kings of the mighty empires of Babylon and Assyria sent embassies to solicit the hand of his daughter in marriage.

The usurping monarch's pride was greatly gratified by these proposals, and he communicated them and his own consent to the princess, who to his great surprise at once negatived them.

"Father," she explained, "as a wife, and even queen to these mighty monarchs, I should only be the chief of a troop of women, for any one of whom his absolute power could, at any moment or for any caprice, displace me. I should be kept in the house of the women, guarded by eunuchs, and never permitted to approach my husband save when he summoned me. This life will not suit me at all. Present thy homage and obligations to these kings, give large gifts to the embassy, and say that to thy great grief thy daughter is already betrothed."

"But thou art not betrothed, daughter," retorted the astonished monarch.

"What matters that?" replied the princess, carelessly. "It is thy answer."

"Art thou mad, daughter?" remonstrated the king. "Hast thou forgotten the time when I purposed thee for the wife of a merchant of Tyre, and thou readily assented to my proposal?"

"No, my father, I have not forgotten that I was then the obscure daughter of a priest, and that now I am a princess of Tyre, the daughter of its king."

"A priest!" repeated Ethbaal, displeased at the implied slight of her remark. "I can tell thee I had more real power as a priest than I now possess as a king, when I had expected to have more."

"Ah," responded Jezebel, "the aged tell me that nothing does turn out as well as we expect, but I mean to be the exception, father, and intend all things to be as I desire."

Ethbaal regarded his daughter as a man might a silly woman or a foolish child who talks nonsense but is tolerated for its prettiness, and he changed the subject.

"Since thou scornest to share the throne of the greatest kings of the world, and yet desirest to be a queen on whom doth thy royal choice fall, daughter?" he inquired ironically.

"On Ahab, the new King of Israel. He will fulfill my conditions, my father," she answered, decidedly.

"Ahab! Israel! that small unsettled neighbouring kingdom," replied the king, dubiously.

"Yea. Beneath my government the country will be settled; under my sway, it will be enlarged, my father."

The king gazed on his daughter for a moment or two, not knowing whether to laugh at her folly or rebuke her boasting. Then, as he marked her resolute air, and recalled instances of her stubborn will, he checked his speech and made no answer.

"Thou sayest the realm is small, father," continued the princess. "That is one of its recommendations to me. Better be a ship in a river free from the storm, and great in the eyes of the beholder, than a ship in the sea tossed by the billows, and insignificant in sight of all. The King of Israel is young and needs the counsel of one near at hand to manage the affairs of his kingdom."

"Young," repeated the astonished king, "why, he is older than thou, who art not yet twenty years of age, — late to be married I allow, but a mere child as to the affairs of state, setting aside thy sex as a woman."

"We shall see," retorted the princess, waving her hand as if to imply the subject was not worth considering. Then she continued, "King Ahab is on his way to Tyre, father. Wilt thou not send an embassy to welcome and escort him into the city?"

The king's amazement knew no limits. "Woman," he cried, "art thou the wooer of thy husband as well as the future ruler of his kingdom?"

“Certainly,” replied the princess, coolly. “If the father needs instruction to secure a husband for his daughter, the latter must offer it.”

Ethbaal, feeling he was getting the worse of the interview, left the chamber without any reply to this bold speech.

We have no space to record this second courtship of Jezebel; King Ahab was dazzled by the first sight of the princess’s extraordinary beauty, and completely captivated by the second. “The half had not been told him,” he said, and when, acting on private instructions, the courtiers informed him of the mighty suppliants for her favour, who had been rejected for the love of the young King of Israel, Ahab’s vanity, as well as his fancy and heart, was touched, and his subjugation was complete.

Magnificent spectacles, royal pageants, splendid banquets, and pleasures in quick succession were held in honour of the royal guest, and his visit of many days was as one prolonged holiday to the two cities.

The betrothal and wedding of the King of Israel and of Jezebel, princess of Tyre, were celebrated with all the pomp, ceremony, and splendour upon which the rich cities of Tyre and Sidon could lavish their wealth and en-

thusiasm; and with a dower that far exceeded the sum bestowed upon the Asiatic princesses, and manifold gifts of priceless worth from the loyal merchant princes of the great maritime ports. So King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, with an attending train almost rivalling that of King Solomon when he went up to the house of the Lebanon, journeyed at length to their capital of Samaria.

As at her first honeymoon, Jezebel determined to begin at once as she meant to proceed, and when her royal husband proposed a *détour* in the direction of Dan, in order that they might jointly present offerings to Jehovah through the symbolic mediation of the golden calf, the queen coldly declined.

"Thy gods are not my gods," she said, "and I cannot join in their worship."

"But, beloved," urged Ahab, "does not the wife naturally follow the religion of her husband?"

"No," replied Jezebel, boldly. "If the husband really loves his wife, he will adopt hers."

This uncompromising statement silenced but did not convert Ahab, who politically as well as religiously clave to the sin of the golden calf which that subtle statesman Jeroboam had invented to alienate Israel from the feasts and sacrifices of the Temple in Jerusalem. Neither Israel nor its kings desired to return into the darkness of heathenism pure and

simple. A man born into Christianity in our day, who objected to its uncompromising light, would be very unlikely to step from it into an outer darkness of Juggernaut or an African fetish. He would naturally prefer the twilight shades of Christian communities more or less fallen from the faith, more or less corrupt. So it was with Ahab. He had bowed in the house of Baal, and joined in the religion of Tyre, prompted by the royal courtesy of kings to comply with the usages of their hosts, but his heart was with the garlands, songs, and dance around the golden calf. He preferred to deity, and he desired to pay his passing homage speak of, and to believe in Jehovah as his chief to the symbol of his God at Dan, by a marriage procession.

But Jezebel had other views for him and for Israel. She had resolved that Baal should be the established god of the land, simply because he was her god, and any recognition of the symbolic calf must be checked.

"Ahab, love of my soul," she said, fondly: "thou hast not granted me one favour since our marriage. Wilt thou give me the one I now ask of thee, my king?"

"What is it, my queen?" was the naturally hesitating answer.

"Nay, if thou canst not trust me, thou dost not love me," she sighed mournfully.

"I do trust and I do love thee," replied the king, "yet I would fain know!"

"Then thou refusest me this first small favour? I would I were back in my father's palace once more," she sighed.

It ended in an unconditional promise to grant her request, which was to give up his visit to the golden calf. The king was exceedingly sorry, like Herod of a later date, but Jezebel kept him to his pledge, and they continued their progress without turning aside to Samaria.

Ahab from his own point of view had even more cause for regret than he knew at the time, as from that day until his death, he never once attended the worship of the golden calf.

The incessant struggle for the crown, which had so long distracted Israel, was now happily at an end, with its uncontested possession by Ahab, and the popularity which generally attends a new monarch was likely to continue in his case, as he possessed many attractive qualities.

In the wonderful word-painting of the Holy Scriptures, a few bold strokes convey a world of meaning, and from the materials there afforded, we can easily sketch the character of Ahab.

In that single sentence, "whom Jezebel his wife stirred up," the secret spring of his actions is unclosed. Weakness, not wickedness, was the motive power, and weakness works more mischief in this world of ours than wickedness. He was half-hearted in the establishment of Baal's worship, although he allowed it, for he offered no opposition to the absolute destruction of the idolatrous prophets and the public acknowledgment of Jehovah. In the matter of Naboth, the king, instead of using his despotic power and seizing the coveted vineyard, offered equal and liberal terms for its purchase, and when the threatened chastisement of the Lord was sent him, instead of hardening his heart like Pharaoh, or throwing the letter in the fire sent by Jehovah by his prophet, as Jehoiakim did, he humbled himself and fasted and went softy in sackcloth. This was the best moral side of his character. Of the mental one we hear that Ahab builded cities and raised an ivory palace, and was a horticulturist and a soldier king, for he could ill brook the encroachments of the King of Syria, or his unjustifiable occupation of Ramoth Gilead. Further, he must have been a man of polished manners and pleasant disposition, for the friendly relations with the royal family of Judah and their frequent intercourse proved Ahab's possession of attractive qualities. One scarcely knows

whether to praise or blame Ahab the most in almost the only act recorded in which he had acted independently of Jezebel's leading-strings.

Black famine stalked everywhere. Hungry children and starving parents filled the air with their feeble moans; the king called the governor of his house and proposed a tour to seek for food. For whom? The gaunt men, the haggard women, the withered children? By no means. To keep the horses and mules alive, that, he explained, "we lose not *all* the beasts." Did this solicitude proceed from that inordinate love of animals which, it is said, closes a human heart to its fellows? or was it from the fear of the loss of valuable property? Let us give the king the benefit of the doubt.

Ahab, in short, was a man and a monarch above, but not too much above, the average of his fellows to be a popular king. His subjects willingly submitted to his sway, and engaged in warfare when he willed, and they were, as a whole, too indifferent to religion not to follow the royal taste in devotion.

To sum up the character of Ahab, it may be said he had the failing common to the majority of humanity. He was a moral coward.

It is not unlikely that this and other faults may have been owing to his early training. His father, Omri, occupied with the political troubles of his

stormy reign, had left the young prince to the guidance of his wives. The elegant tastes and accomplishments which, we gather, belonged to Ahab, were dearly bought at the cost of his manliness; and effeminacy and softness of will and purpose were paid for by forfeited strength.

Ahab, in youth, was not lacking in personal comeliness. His features had the aquiline regularity of his race, and his figure, of middle height, was agile and well formed; but indolence and self-indulgence soon coarsened his face and weighted his body with flesh; the king in early middle age was heavy and lymphatic, and inclined to shift the burden of government and affairs to the brains equal to their management and the hands capable of it, and those brains and hands were ever in the possession of the queen.

Thus all went well with Jezebel. The prince of the demons had found it worth his while to keep his word. The ivory palace Ahab had built was given for the occupation of the queen and her children, and its halls and gardens of beauty and delight were the wonder and admiration of Asia. The prophets of Baal and the groves filled the land and devoured its substance, and Jezebel ruled without let or hindrance over Israel.

CHAPTER XVI.

REVELATIONS

A YEAR and a day has passed since the prophet pronounced the awful curse upon Azalim. After the victim realized the horror and hopelessness of the blow which had fallen upon him, he passed weeks in the alternation of fits of frenzy and despair. The dreadful disease had taken possession of his body in its extremest and most deadly form, and there was not a spot upon him which the tip of his finger could cover that was not visibly affected, nor an internal organ that was not a centre of intolerable anguish.

How he lived was a miracle. The scraps thrown aside by travellers on the highway, the fruit overhanging the fences of the orchards and vineyards kept life in him. Suicide is not a common Oriental crime; it was rare among the Israelites, and although the unhappy sufferer longed and supplicated for death, he never thought of anticipating its dread visitation. From morn to eve, and even

through the night, Azalim wandered aimlessly up and down, to and fro, only resting when, from sheer exhaustion, he sank half senseless on the ground.

Shut out from the society of their fellow men, the lepers, following the gregarious instinct of all things endowed with animal life, formed a community among themselves, but in the utter wretchedness of Azalim's broken heart, he repulsed the advances to intercourse from the other sufferers, and lived apart in his isolated agony. He uttered the doleful warning cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" whenever he came in sight of any living being, otherwise no syllable of speech issued from the dumb anguish in which his soul was steeped and his voice stifled.

For months this state of things continued, then there came a lull, a rest to the sufferer. His disease was not mitigated, nor had hope come to him, and yet a something akin to peace hovered over him. The fact was, that time and usage had blunted the nerves of suffering. As long as the soul dwells in the heavy, fleshly tabernacle of living mortality, the duration of its torture is limited, and as long as the body can suffer without death, time will bring endurance, and so it came to pass with Azalim.

He had wandered southward to the deserts, and was not far from the highroad that bordered that

smaller one which was a selected haunt of the lepers, and adjoined the home of his once betrothed Zillah. He had travelled aimlessly during the night, and, well-nigh worn out with fatigue, was about to lie down, when the dismal cry of the leper met his ear, and caused him to start suddenly, and then hasten his steps toward the spot from whence it proceeded.

Azalim did not recognize the man who had uttered the cry, nor did the other know him. In proportion to the blindness of their eyes, however, a sharpening of the ears seemed given, and "Issachar!" "Azalim!" were the names almost instantly exchanged as they met.

"Thou, then, art one of us, Azalim!" was the greeting of Issachar.

"And thou?" was the answer.

"Ay. Soon after my return to Gilead the spot appeared. I crossed the Jordan, showed myself to a priest of Jehovah, was pronounced unclean, and am banished to this death in life. How is it I have never met thee? and how didst thou escape from Syria?"

"The Lord God hath smitten me, and the story is too long to tell," replied Azalim, to whom a strange pleasure, unknown for so many months, had come, the pleasure of intercourse with other men, and his spirits insensibly rose as he conversed with this ac-

quaintance of his earlier days, after twelve months of solitude and self-banishment.

The two were standing on a rocky ascent in the smaller desert overlooking the highroad which skirted it. A long procession with banners and cymbals and loud cries passed by, and shouts of "Baal save the king!" "Long live the king!" and "May his son live to reign in his father's stead!" reached their ears.

"What means this uproar?" inquired Azalim, with a languid interest.

"Dost thou not know? Hast thou not heard," said Issachar, "that a son is born to the king and queen, and so the land rejoices?"

"The king and queen?" repeated Azalim, dreamily. In his long mental and bodily agony, the past, if not swept from his memory, was clouded in it.

"Yea, Ahab and Jezebel. Surely thou must remember that our young king wedded the daughter of the King of Sidon, and, by the golden calf, now I recollect the queen, then the high priest's daughter, chose thee to lean on when thou wert a doorkeeper in the house of Rimmon."

Azalim's head swam and his steps staggered as though Issachar had dealt him a blow, but recover-

ing with an effort, he inquired: "When did the royal marriage take place?"

"When? At least a year ago, and we lepers can be free of speech, — for the law, like all other things, leaves us alone, — so I dare tell thee that the queen is the king, and the wife the husband, the woman the man, on our throne. But thou needest food and rest, man!" he said, noticing the swaying figure of his companion. "Sit down under the shadow of this rock and I will share my portion with thee."

Issachar gave Azalim food and water, and went his way, leaving his friend to reflect alone upon his tidings.

Jezebel, his wife, had married the King of Israel almost immediately upon his departure from Dan. The treacherous woman, then, had plotted this, and sent him away to his doom. She was the Queen of Israel, and he —

This unexpected and painful tidings, instead of crushing Azalim, roused him, even imparted a strength and energy to his system which he had lost from the moment the leprosy had fallen upon him. A sharp, deep indignation possessed his spirit. This woman, he believed, had destined him to destruction. He would live, if only to thwart her

schemes. He ate and drank, and then lay down and slept.

He was awakened by the sound of a bell pealing as though in summons. He rose, and, looking around, observed on the slope of a hill by the side of the highway a high tower attached to a white house, surrounded by gardens and vineyards, from which the bell was pealing. On turning to the desert side, he perceived a number of figures approaching the northern rocks, which sheltered them from the fierce sun and hurricanes of wind and sand which passed over the plain. He saw at once that they were lepers, for their only garments were short breeches, leaving their bodies and limbs bare, partly to avoid the irritation caused by the friction of clothes, and partly to afford as little surface as possible for the contagion of their disease. Azalim hastened to join the throng, and questioned them as to their destination.

“Welcome to our stricken band, thou afflicted one!” was the answer of the nearest. “Join us. Thou hast missed thy notice, but there is always enough and to spare at the table of the handmaids of the lepers!”

Without further parley, Azalim followed the rest of the party to the tables covered with food such as his eyes had not rested upon for the long year passed.

Bread, fruit, dried and baked meats of kid and lambs, with cheeses and the vegetable salads that could be eaten uncooked, were spread in abundance upon large leaves, and water was plentifully provided in jars. Upon a high board were written these words:

“Give glory to the God of Israel and bless the handmaids of the lepers!”

Each man stood in his place whilst the eldest gave a few words of thanks and blessing, and then they commenced their feast. There was enough and to spare for Azalim, who received every attention and welcome from his brother sufferers.

When the repast was finished, the tables were cleared, and the guests — for such indeed they were — returned to the shade of the rocks, and reclined upon the sand collected at their base. Every living being has his own little individual world, and the lepers had theirs; and as it is impossible to live and be always miserable, neither topics nor merriment were lacking in their desert club.

The great consoler, tobacco, was unknown — it goes without saying — three thousand years ago, and the lepers lacked its aid to kill the time, soothe their nerves, and supply an occupation for their idleness, but a large skin of wine was ready at hand, for it was a favourite and frequent charity with the

public to leave supplies of wine near the haunts of the lepers, and under the brightening influence of this contribution, the talk grew lively and the gossip free.

Considering their isolation from the world, it was surprising how well acquainted the lepers were with its affairs. The politics, the court, the state of religion, even the family and business matters of the elders of their people, were discussed and commented upon, and Azalim, whose interests were now reawakened to life and its objects, lay quietly listening to the events of the past year, and made bitter reflections on the cruel betrayal and desertion of the woman he had so madly loved and obeyed to such fearful cost. Nor was his indignation lessened by the information imparted to him by his companions of the power, prosperity, and happiness of this queen who had so fatally injured him.

By and by, the subject changed, and one sitting by him inquired of his neighbour if Phanuel, the father of their handmaid, the princess, were likely to recover from the sickness that had afflicted him.

A sudden curiosity came over Azalim. He did not listen for the answer, but rather eagerly interrupted with another question:

“Who is Phanuel?” and “Who is your handmaid, the princess?”

“Why,” returned the other, in an amazed tone, “how long hast thou been stricken, and where hast thou been kept hidden, as not to know that the food thou hast this noonday eaten, and which is provided daily without stint to every leper who at dawn strikes his note upon the desert bell, is given free to us for the love of the God of Israel, by Zillah, the daughter of Phanuel, the Gileadite, who lives on the slope of the hill yonder, beyond the border of the desert.”

“But,” cried Azalim, to whose brow the blood rose raging, although no sign of it appeared on the unnatural white skin, “Phanuel, the Gileadite, was not a king, and his daughter Zillah is the wife of old Isaac, of Gilboa. How can she be a princess, and the handmaid, as thou callest her, of the lepers?”

“She is no wife,” answered the leper. “She was betrothed to Azalim, the head herdsman of her father, and the very day of their espousals a Syrian band seized him and the cattle of her dowry and carried them to Damascus. There her false bridegroom saw the daughter of the stranger and wedded her, and Zillah — ah, there were no lack of suitors to fill her false lover’s place, but she would none of them. She and a companion bewailed their virginity on the mountains, and then they offered

themselves to the Lord Jehovah through the mediation of his mighty prophet Elijah. Surely, thou, an Israelite, hath heard of this man of God? ”

“ Go on! ” cried Azalim, hoarsely.

“ Elijah presented them to the Lord,” continued the narrator, “ and offered a sacrifice of supplication; and they say the fire fell from heaven, and the lepers were given to her care. The prophet calls these two holy maidens the daughters of the King of kings, and she calls herself the handmaid of the lepers, and so we say she is our princess hand— Why, man, what ails thee, — art thou sick? ”

Azalim had fallen back upon the sand-bank apparently lifeless.

They tended him with the care and tenderness of a woman for her infant, these rough and stricken men. At morn and at even a messenger stood beneath the bell-tower of Zillah’s house and received the remedies and directions which Zillah and the widow let down by chains on a metal platform. This medical aid was part of her mission; she studied diligently the disease of leprosy, and collected and prepared herbs, potions, and bandages, which, if they could not cure what was incurable, greatly alleviated the suffering. She knew not why, but she felt a very unusual interest in this case, and was always at her post at the window of the bell-tower before

the messenger arrived. For many days, Azrael, the angel of death, hovered over Azalim, waiting for his prey. Then a command came to stay his hand, for three times a day Zillah had gone to the altar of the Lord, where she had offered her vows, and, impelled by a power stronger than herself, had prayed that this leper's life might be spared; and his life was given back to her petition.

For weeks the poor sufferer could not even turn upon his desert couch of sand, and but for the cordials and medicines from Zillah, and the tending of his brother lepers, would never have risen from it. The wild babblings of his fever had not revealed his identity, nor did he, when reason returned, give any intelligence which could lead to its discovery. He communed with his own thoughts, and made no confidant. The hand of God was heavy upon him. In judgment it had been sent, and, contradictory as it may sound, in mercy it was not removed. Blow upon blow, stroke upon stroke, blast upon blast must fall upon the human heart ere the living waters flow forth. Such is the divine discipline, and, as for the present, Azalim's nature was hardening under it, the time for the removal of the chastening hand was not yet come.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CRÈCHE

AZRAEL, the death angel, had unfolded his wings and no longer hovered over the head of Azalim, but it seemed as though he had taken the desire of life with him, for the sufferer still lay without vitality or apparent progress toward recovery. At length a slight reaction occurred.

He had turned away from a strengthening draught a comrade offered.

"This is ungrateful," remarked the latter. "Our princess's handmaiden prepared it with her own hands, and never fails to ask of thy health morn and eve."

"Does she ask for — Does she care for me, then?" inquired Azalim, with an awakening interest, and fixing his eyes eagerly on the speaker.

"Yea. From the hour we went to her for help, she took a strange interest in thee, and is ever asking if we have discovered thy name and kindred."

Azalim, without another word, took the cup from

the other's hand, and drank the contents; from that time he cared for his health, and, becoming a docile patient, began to progress rapidly.

A strong impulse moved him to see again the face of her whom he thought had deserted him, but whom he now knew he had deeply — although unintentionally — wronged, and one early morn he felt sufficiently well to start by himself for the storehouse on the highroad.

There was a rough shed at the side of the building inside which, in a rainy season, the asses stood to be laden, and here Azalim took shelter, thrusting the door ajar so as to command the view of all that went on outside.

He had not long to wait. The bright colouring that announced day had not faded from the sky, ere a little cavalcade could be seen descending the hill from the white house, and approaching the store-room. Half a dozen strong mules and asses with their drivers, two women and a deaf and dumb lad mounted on small mountain ponies, soon reached the place, and immediately began the business of transferring the contents of the building to the panniers and backs of the animals.

The knees of Azalim trembled under him. His heart beat with struggling pain in his bosom. The blood rushed and then stopped suddenly in his

veins, and a cold sweat broke out over his body as the foremost woman dismounted and opened the door of the storehouse.

It was Zilllah! Yet, was it Zillah? Was it the maiden of his boyish fancy — Zillah, the first love of his youth? Was this the damsel of whom he thought all the day, as he galloped after his cattle on the plains or among the hills, and met at the wells in the evening to express with jest and caress the warm love he felt for her. Was this Zillah? Yea — No — *Was* it Zillah?

Zillah had been the fairest maiden in Gilead, — the loveliest bud in the garden of womanhood, but she had been only a maiden, only a bud, full of promise, but with nothing then of the perfection of the blossom, the maturity of the woman. Scarcely three years had passed, and lo! the transformation had been effected as by a magic wand.

Yes, it was Zillah. It was Zillah, but — there was a change. Sweet and merry and attractive she was, but not like this, and as Azalim regarded his lost love he marvelled at the change, the marvellous development. There was an inexpressible sweetness in her face certainly, but no weakness on the firm, well-formed mouth, and it would have been a bold nature who could trample on a woman at once so decided and so gentle. She had gained in

height, had matured to an almost perfect beauty, and Azalim felt as if his love for the woman had changed into a reverence for an angel.

Yet how he loved her still. How the old passion stirred and revived within him. How he felt as though the purification of his love would even cleanse the leprosy of his body. The impure lust, as he now thought it, with which Jezebel had ensnared him grew as loathsome to him as his disease. "Oh, God of our fathers," he groaned in his agony — "Even thou canst not recall the past!"

He continued to watch her, his soul shining through his haggard eyes, every nerve in his quivering body strained to its utmost tension. Her beauty awed him. It was so expressive, so exquisitely pure and lovable, it filled him with light and love and strange unearthly pleasure. She was dressed in white. Her dark brown hair was fastened with a kind of snood, from off her face, and fell in soft waving tresses to her waist, after the mode of unmarried women. The natural merriment of her character came out frequently with her companion, a comely, attractive maiden, although of a mould inferior in all respects to her friend.

The storehouse was cleared, and its contents placed upon the beasts, and, all unconscious of the

eyes that had been watching her, Zillah and her attendants returned to their homes.

Overwhelmed with the excitement and emotion of the scene he had witnessed, Azalim directed his steps to his desert resting-place, and, leaning his elbows on his knees and his head upon his hands, he thought over his wrecked past life and hopeless future, and so he remained in dull despair, until the first stroke of the desert bell warned him to add his toll to the number. After the noonday meal, the usual friendly chat followed, and then during the afternoon heat each chose a sand couch for his siesta.

During this repose, Azalim had troubled dreams of his Syrian life, and of the neglected infant of his secret marriage. The impression was strong enough to remain upon his waking thoughts, and his conscience sharply smote him with shame and remorse at his forgetfulness of the child he had, as he believed, so deeply loved.

"Yet, what can I do?" he asked himself. "I dare not even approach her, far less take any steps to remove her from Syria, or place her in Israel. What can I do?"

Yet he could not banish the thought of rescuing the child, for his strong love for it was returning and warming his heart. At last the thought occurred

to him to cast the child into Zillah's storehouse; and throw it upon the compassion and love of his once betrothed wife.

He was lying upon his sand-couch under the rock, with the bright stars of the Eastern sky shining above him, when this inspiration came. Without loss of time he rose, buckled the wallet that contained his knife and drinking-cup, and was also a receptacle for food, and, seizing the stout staff that served to help his way and be a defence against man and beast, he started at once on his journey, striking to the northeast toward the Lebanon, and stopping on his way for rest only when literally spent with fatigue.

His soul was troubled as to the fate of the child. He knew that Jezebel had grown indifferent to it the first month or two after its birth, and therefore was not likely to have troubled herself about its maintenance; and the peasant, to whom it had been given to nurse, was poor, and could ill afford to keep it without payment. All these reflections agitated him and quickened his progress.

It was in the afternoon when he reached the village where little Astarté had been put to nurse. The door of the house was half-open, and Azalim entered, to find it empty, although there were signs of late occupation in the small sitting-room. Sud-

denly he recollected his leprosy, and hastily left the place and hastened down the village street, — now deserted from the heat of the day, — toward the fields where the women, as well as the men, worked. When he came in view of these, his keen, quick sight recognized the woman he sought, in a portion of a brick-field, conversing, or rather quarrelling with a man whom he also remembered as her husband, for their voices, raised loud in anger, reached his ears. To his great joy he saw that she had a child wrapped on her back, of about the age of his little daughter.

His unthinking impulse was to hail them. Fortunately he remembered in time that he was a leper, so, stealing behind the fences, he reached the one close to the couple, and, crouching behind it, listened to their dispute.

It was about the child the woman held behind her. The man violently reproached her with the burden it was to them, and for the love and attention she bestowed upon it. He declared that he had had enough of other men's children, and that neither he nor she should leave the field until she had thrown the young beggar behind the hedge, never to enter their door again.

The wife refused; their words grew fiercer, and at last, so great was the provocation on both sides,

the husband raised his staff and showered such blows upon the woman and child, that perforce she yielded, and with loud cries and reproaches flung the little creature over the fence, as he had insisted.

The baby fell at the feet of her father.

Azalim had forsaken the God of Israel, nay, he had taken Baal for his God, and when the dire chastisement of leprosy had fallen upon him, instead of humbling his heart, he hardened it under the strokes of the divine hammer. But now, when, as by a series of coincidences, which ended, as it were, in a special message, if not a miracle, his little daughter was thus given back to him, the mercy melted where the blow hardened, and, for the first time since Jezebel's mocking laugh in the temple, he fell on his knees, confessed his sin to, and glorified and thanked the Lord God of his fathers.

He dared not touch the child, lest he should infect her. Looking around in perplexity, he perceived a large, dried sheepskin, which had been left by the labourers; he rolled the half-stunned baby in it, tied it around her, leaving a space over its face, and, carefully averting it from contact with his breath, he made all haste to quit the vicinity.

As he went, another difficulty arose. To travel afoot with the child would take many days, and necessitate food and shelter. Then, again, help

came. He was passing behind the house of the rich man of the village, and at the stable door a strong, white ass, of the swiftest, largest breed, was standing, ready saddled and bridled, with a large travelling mantle thrown over it. In every age, all is fair in war as in love, and, as Syria and Israel were enemies, Azalim made no scruple of annexing the ass and mantle as lawful spoil. The Damascenes had robbed him of his cattle; he had a right, in return, to this ass of Lebanon. With an agility of which his leprosy had not deprived him, Azalim sprang into the saddle of the waiting steed. No one was at hand, none witnessed the appropriation, and no wild ass of the wilderness sped away more swiftly than did the captured ass, bearing the rescued child and the rejoicing father.

Without let or hindrance, the trio reached the lepers' desert, and here the brotherhood gave him food, with which he and his child had been but sparingly supplied. Azalim lay and rested in a sheltered rock valley until the earliest dawn of day, then carried his child to the storehouse of the princess's hand-maiden. Unwrapping the sheepskin, he slid his little daughter through the side trap, by which the offerings to the lepers were sent by the pious hearts and willing hands of pitying charity, and, retreating

into the shed, watched, with beating pulses, through the chink of the slightly-opened door.

He had not long to wait. He saw the cavalcade of mercy start from the door of the white house and arrive at the store. Zillah dismounted, and placed the key in the lock of the door. He had wondered at the silence of the child, but the fact was that the little creature had seen by the light, which came through the bars, the cakes and fruit which were heaped upon the grating, and was quietly occupied in feasting upon them. The cry of surprise with which Zillah threw open the door was answered by a shriek of alarm from the baby, at sight of a stranger.

"Anah, Anah! Come here! Look, there is a little child, and playing with the fruit upon the grating. How could it have got here? What does it mean?" cried Zillah, whose excitement seemed rather unaccountable to the more phlegmatic Anah.

"It got here through the trap, of course, sister," she replied, "and no doubt was cast through by some one who wanted to get rid of it. A Syrian, too, as one can tell by the texture and manner of the swathings, and covered, poor orphan, with the dust and disorder of a long journey. Let me bring it to the pool, and wash its poor little face and

hands," she added, attempting to take it from Zillah's arms.

"Nay, Anah, it is no Syrian. It is one of our own people. Look at its face. It is an Israelite. Ah!" she continued, with something like a sigh, "it seems to me as if, even in these little features, I see something familiar, — a memory of a face known long ago."

"Let me look at it, princess," said the older of the mule drivers, coming forward. "I am the father of a troop of children, as thou knowest, and can judge. Ay, thou art right, my mistress. She is a daughter of Abraham, and if I mistake not of the tribe of Manasseh, of Gileadite parentage, although," looking keenly into the infant face, "I don't say but there might be a touch of the stranger in her face; her mother was an outlandish woman, perchance."

"Then I will be its mother," said Zillah. "Wilt thou take me for thy mother, babe?" she said, looking down on the child with a look of sweet and infinite love, that was perfectly comprehended and instantly reciprocated by the little one, who responded with a "yea, yea," in the Syrian language, and a fond cry of "mother," for she was two years old, and very intelligent.

"Did I not say, Asher, she was Syrian?" said Anah, addressing the driver. "She speaks it."

"Speaking a tongue does not make one a native of the country," he answered. "If I were born in a stable, it would not make me a horse."

"No, I suppose not," responded Zillah. "The little one can speak, so perhaps it can tell us its name, and that may be a help to its origin. What do they call thee, thou little rosebud of Sharon?" smiling on the child.

"Tarté," returned the baby.

"That does not help us," said Zillah. "Well, we must not waste our time. Anah, wilt thou attend to this lamb, whom the Lord Jehovah hath sent us, whilst I arrange the provisions?"

Anah, who was a precise, methodical person, was scandalized at the tumbled, soiled appearance of the foundling, and, carrying it to a pool at a little distance, proceeded to wash the dirt from its face and hands.

A bath, administered by a kind and skilful hand, gives pleasure to the childish temperament, but partial ablution is its abhorrence, and to wash its hands and face at irregular periods is regarded by it as an outrage to its body and an insult to its feelings. The screams of the little Astarté, under Anah's treatment, brought the entire party to the spot, and

caused the first ungentle words that Zillah had ever given her companion.

“O sister! sister! How canst thou dare be unkind to the fatherless orphan of the Most High?”

“See what my unkindness hath produced, and hold thy peace, sister,” retorted Anah, holding the little one, now pacified and smiling, toward Zillah, who, astonished at the surpassing infantine loveliness, from which the mask of the soil had been removed, held her peace, and stood lost in admiration, gazing upon the child.

“By the rod of Moses,” muttered Asher, “I thought my Naomi was the fairest little maid on this side Jordan; what will her mother say to this one?”

The superb beauty of both her parents was surely reproduced in miniature in this little Astarté, who, standing on the threshold of childhood, yet retained a certain charm of infancy, which lingered around the lovely little vision as though loth to depart.

What was it that shot a pang of pain through the heart of Zillah, as her eyes drank in the loveliness of this little one? What meant the tear that trembled on her eyelashes, the sad sigh half-stifled in her bosom? Was it some unconscious affinity with that unfaithful lover, who now, in silent agony, stood a miserable leper in banishment? No; her unaccountable emotion had nothing to do with her

once affianced husband, but was caused solely by his child. Those around Zillah were wont to think, and sometimes to say, that when, in passing by on his visitation to the schools of the prophets, the great Elijah entered the house of Zillah, and blessed her, a portion of the prophetic spirit of his God fell upon the holy maiden, and she felt within her the power to predict the future of those around her. Now, as she looked upon the almost celestial beauty of this little child, she saw in the depths of its divine eyes the story of deep affliction and early death, and a deep pity took possession of her being and a sweet impulse urged her to take the baby to her heart, and mother its helplessness, while yet the evil days were afar off.

When the work was finished, she directed that a pannier should be left empty on the quietest mule for the child, and that the party should move on, and leave her to follow.

When they had gone on their way, she took the little Astarté on her lap, and talked and sang to it until she entirely won its childish heart. Then, tenderly placing it in the pannier, she drove homewards, and Azalim watched them until he saw them arrive at the white house, — his daughter's future home.

Several times a mad desire came over the un-

happy father to emerge from his hiding-place, throw himself on the ground before Zillah, and confess all. Then the remembrance of his loathsomeness, and the unsupportable shame of his treachery and infidelity, restrained him.

The joy with which he witnessed the success of his scheme for the adoption was chastened and mixed with the pain of reflection on what might have been. When, at last, he left the shed, carrying with him the intolerable torture of his body and mind, he alternated the melancholy warning cry of the leper, with the repetition of one word, — “Lost! Lost! Lost!”

And so the years passed by: Jezebel in her ivory palace; Azalim, the outcast leper of the desert. The Lord, God of one, the master, prince of the other; both knew the end, from the beginning of these two lives, and each monarch led his son and his subject by the paths leading to their inevitable ends. It was the enaction of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, divinely spoken a thousand years afterward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BALCONY SCENE

FROM the hour that Azalim saw his lost love and his rescued child enter the door of the white house, a restless, overwhelming desire possessed him to see and speak once more to Zillah, to claim her pity, obtain her forgiveness, and to renew the protests and vows of his love, which had returned to him in all the freshness of his youth, with the added strength of a man's maturity. The low, fierce passion of his senses, the mental subjection and perversion of soul he had yielded to Jezebel, had passed away in his indignation at the discovery of her baseness, and the whole allegiance of his being returned to Zillah, when he heard the story of her constancy, and remembered his own desertion and unfaithfulness.

He learned from his leper companions, that the princess, as they delighted to call her, often came out upon the latticed balcony of her chamber to meditate, and study the language of the stars, when,

at the midnight hour, the Eastern sky was stillest and clearest, and the lamps of heaven shone brightest. Night after night he would haunt the vicinity of her house, and when he saw the white figure of a woman stand out clear and defined from the dark shadow of the house, he would fall on his knees and cover his face with his hands in utter despair and abandonment of grief at the bitter thought of all that he had lost, and of all that, but for his own credulous folly, might have been.

Oh, that he could tell her all, and pour out the heart store of his love in her ears, but not for a moment did he forget his leprosy, that barrier worse than death. He likewise remembered his promise to Elijah, that he would never put away the wife he had so rashly chosen. He knew that Zillah would never consent to wed him as a second wife, believing, as many of the Israelite women did, that if the Creator had designed polygamy in marriage, he would not have created in the beginning only one man and one woman. Azalim's eager desire, therefore, to confess his fault to Zillah, obtain her forgiveness, and profess his love, was entirely apart from any selfish or future considerations.

One night, when he beheld from afar the beloved and motionless figure, his burden of soul was so heavy, his yearning love so overwhelming, and the

desire to express his long pent-up feelings so imperative, that he drew nearer and nearer to the house, and at last found concealment behind some low trees and bushes very near the railed balcony on which Zillah stood, and from whence he could see her clearly, and hear her voice distinctly.

He was startled almost to awe by the sight of Zillah. The moon was at the full, the stars shone with burning splendour. She seemed to stand in a very flood of light, and Azalim thought that never had mortal woman before appeared of such entrancing and divine loveliness.

He could contain himself no longer; a cry came to his lips and rang forth through the strange light and clear, cool air.

She awoke from her reverie, and looked around with an alarmed air. A sudden flush, then as rapid a paleness, came over her face, and she inquired in a low, agitated voice, "Who calls?" Who speaks?"

"It is I. It is Azalim," he answered, in a voice as agitated as hers, and then he repeated, in a firmer tone, "I am Azalim."

"Who?" she faltered. "Ah, no, it cannot be."

"It is. I am Azalim, thy unworthy betrothed. Oh, Zillah, send me not away. Hear me, I pray thee."

She did not answer. Had she turned into marble? There is a pagan story of a sculptor so enamoured of the form he had moulded that he prayed the gods to turn it into a woman, and his wish was granted. There is a fact of another transformation of a woman into a pillar of salt, and as Azalim regarded the rigid form and deathlike face of Zillah as she stood calm and unsupported before the front of the balcony, he was about instinctively to leap forth to her, when she placed her hand upon the top bar of the lattice to steady herself as she leaned forward, and he remained concealed.

"If thou art Azalim," she said, in a low, sad voice, "come forth, if thou desirest to speak with me."

"I cannot, I dare not," he replied. "Oh, Zillah, trust and hear me."

"Speak," she said.

"They deceived me with false tales; they saidst thou wedded Isaac of Gilboa, and then in anger and despair —" He stopped.

"Thou loved and wedded another. Ah, Azalim, that love was but lightly rooted that so quickly blossomed and bloomed again."

"It was not thus," he said, humbly. "It was wrath and despair, not love. My love fell away from her who usurped thy place, and returned to

thee when I knew that she was false and that thou hadst been true to me."

"I would fain believe thee, Azalim," returned Zillah, softly. "A woman's heart is a weak, trusting thing, and I think the thought of thy treachery, my lost husband, wounded me deeper than the stroke that killed my love. But come forth, I entreat thee, plead thy cause face to face, and let me once more behold the face of him to whom alone of all the sons of men I ever have or ever shall give the love a wife should give her husband."

"Oh, Zillah," cried Azalim, a wild hope springing up within him, "do I hear right? If events allow, wouldst thou forgive the past and take me for thy husband?"

"Never," she replied, gravely. "That hope is past for ever. I am vowed to the service of the King of kings and would not leave it if I could."

A stifled sob came from Azalim; he could not answer her.

"Come forth. Why hidest thou, my friend?" continued Zillah. "Thou wast deceived and I forgive thee thy desertion. Thou sayest that thou lovest me still, and I tell thee that my love for thee hath never strayed and will never stray to another man, although I cannot again give it back to thee as thou desirest. Let us once more meet face to

face that I may give thee my forgiveness, my blessing, and farewell."

Azalim uttered a cry of unspeakable anguish, a sound of such utter misery and despair that it touched the heart of Zillah, who, in an accent of the greatest sympathy and anxiety, inquired the cause.

"The Lord hath smitten me," he cried, "I cannot come forth. I am a leper."

Zillah placed her hands over her eyes; she felt as though she had received a mortal wound. She had throughout this interchange of words held a firm control over herself, for the strong current of human love had flowed back over her whole nature, the longing to see once more the betrothed lover of her young maidenhood had overpowered her. He had been deceived and she was ready to forgive him. They were separated by his act and her vocation, and she would not have it otherwise, yet she was human and a woman, and felt that if again she could behold the face of Azalim and know that she was not banished from his heart, something of the past would come back and bestow on her more content for the future.

But Azalim a leper! The shock was an arrow of death. Her weakness was of short duration. Strength was given and she was again herself.

"Come forth, my friend, my brother," she cried,

leaning over the balcony toward the foliage which concealed the afflicted man. "God hath given the lepers into my charge. Azalim, my one love, my chosen bridegroom, it wanted but this to make thee mine for evermore; shrink not, I pray thee, from the presence of the handmaid of the lepers."

The infinite love and tenderness of Zillah's tone fell upon Azalim like dew upon drought. He no longer hung back, no longer hesitated, but, quitting his place of concealment, came forward and stood below the balcony where Zillah bent forward, awaiting him.

There was a terrible contrast between these two living beings illuminated by the silvered light. The woman's rare beauty was heightened, spiritualized, glorified by the singular radiance; the plague-stricken deformity of the leper was exaggerated by it to even a more fearful spectacle than when under the full rays of a noontide sun; yet these two were once, and that not so long ago, the goodliest and fairest of the youth of Gilead, and now, incredible as it seemed, the love they once felt for one another was intensified and redoubled.

With the first recognition of Azalim's voice, when her name rang out in the midnight air, all the pent up and half-stifled passion of Zillah's soul returned, and resentment for her wrongs changed

to forgiveness, and wounded pride to pity, when she found he had been cruelly deceived. The past came rushing back like a warm south breeze, and mingled its sweet retrospect with present renewal and future faith. Perchance the shock of Azalim's confession, "I am a leper," acted as an interposition of safety to them both, for it turned the human love, newly revived in the heart of Zillah, into a sweet compassion, which probably restored the divine dedication that mere woman's love might have shattered.

For a short while, they stood silently facing one another, she with an expression of the most exquisite compassion on her face, he with the very bitterness of death in his marred features and blighted form, as he cried :

"Behold me. A leper, an outcast, accursed of God and men. Ay, look upon thy once betrothed husband, thou daughter of Phanuel, and curse me to my face ere I depart !"

"I will bless thee now and to the end, O Azalim, once dear to my soul, and now dearer than ever, as the gift of heaven consecrated for my service. The lepers are mine, and thou art a leper, and in thy life, and till death, ay, and in the after-life, thou art mine. Draw near to me, my friend, my

brother, my rightful bridegroom, and take the blessing of the handmaid of the lepers."

He obeyed, and came close beneath the balcony on which she stood. She bent over it, and stretching her hands over his head, she repeated the words of the blessing: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee and give thee his peace now and for evermore."

Carefully following every precaution which would prevent infection, Zillah arranged occasional interviews with Azalim, during which she encouraged his spirit, suggested hope, and in every possible way strengthened and comforted him. He confided to her the parentage of the child he had committed to her care in the storehouse, and his heart was filled with grateful happiness when she assured him that he might from henceforth regard her as the mother of the little daughter she loved as a mother already, for its own sake. His own interest and affection for the little maiden was kept alive by frequently seeing her in the vicinity of the house of Zillah.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE UNEXPECTED

THE queen sat at her lattice, in the ivory palace of Jezreel, glittering in her regal garments, with gems in her still luxuriant hair, and paint and powder on her haughty face. The hanging gardens were exquisite, the royal city of Jezreel fair, the smiling country beyond fruitful and blooming, and Jezebel felt she was indeed the queen of all this, with the king, her husband, for her chief vassal. Like the sovereign of Babylon, she said in her heart, "Is not all this mine by the might of *my* power; and for the honour of *my* majesty?" adding, in the swelling pride and security of her spirit, the sense, if not the words, of the woman viewed in vision by St. John the Divine: "I sit as a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow."

Then her eye fell upon a different scene, and a gentler expression came into her serpentine eyes; her sullen brow relaxed, and a smile almost of softness fell upon her cruel lips, for under a group of

palm trees below the great central terrace, three little children, two lads and a maiden, were playing with some pets, — apes and bright-hued peacocks from the land of Ophir we now call India, and a caged, catlike creature of the rarest long-haired fur from the nearer land of Persia. Half a dozen attendants servilely obeyed the orders and caprices of these children, who were the princes and princess of the royal family of Israel, the sons and daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

She watched them for a short while and then retreated into the chamber behind; throwing herself upon a low divan, she called her wolf-dog Moloch, who was crouching in a corner and was still the recipient of her familiar's visits. Jezebel's attachment to this creature was increasingly strong; she had gained from the science of the witches a knowledge of drugs which continually renewed its strength and youth, and in response to incessant spells and invocations, she had obtained a prediction that Moloch should live not only as long as herself, but would survive her.

"Moloch," she said, in soft, confidential tones, as the creature laid his head upon her lap and she played with his long, drooping ears, "was I not wise, and has it not been well that I rejected the old Samech's council to give up the rich substance

and reality of this present life, of which I so well know the value, for the vapoury phantom of some future one which may have no existence, and, in truth, in which I do not myself believe?"

With the wondrous intelligence of the animal creation, Moloch answered his mistress with signs which humanity might itself have expressed by head and hand.

Still caressing the dog's ears and neck, the queen fell into pleasant thought and retrospect. Everything had turned out according to her desire. Beelzebub had in truth been a good master. She would not grudge him the payment of her after-life, if there were one. She was glad she had rejected the Babylonian and Assyrian crowns. "Better be the first of the dwarfs than the last of the giants, for the dwarf standing on the shoulder of the giant sees farther than the giant himself, — and the mere head of the women in Babylon and Nineveh would have been, in reality, lower in power and in influence than this hand of mine moving the kingly sway in the little kingdom of Israel. My religion also is established among these Hebrews, and has overthrown that of Jehovah, whom alone among the gods, they tell me, Beelzebub fears."

"Ah," she continued her reflections, "how well

all things have turned out. I grieved for my goodly young Israelite husband, but if he had lived, what an entanglement would have arisen. Ahab is my slave, but slaves sometimes throw off their yoke, and the king, weak as he is, is yet strong in pride, and would spurn the wife of a captive herdsman for his queen, and — ” she added, with a flush, half of anger, half of apprehension, “ I am not sure, once accomplished, but he might be glad of his liberty.”

A short pause of thought and silence, and then she addressed Moloch. “ All goes well, my faithful friend,” she whispered. “ There is no need to call thy namesake to grant my wishes, for I have not one ungratified. Yet, I *have* one, after all,” she corrected herself. “ Hear it, Moloch. It is that I had a wish for something that I have not! Shall we call him, friend? I do not need him, yet thou shalt decide if we want him. Say, lift thy right paw if it be yea. Shall we call him?” she repeated, laughingly.

Moloch raised his right paw from her lap, and held it upward.

At this action of the dog, something seemed to pass between the queen and the light, and the warm summer air, which came through the lattice, chilled her in passing. Jezebel’s exultant mood received an inexplicable check, and she rose, and again

looked out at the window, to see a queen's messenger enter by a narrow postern gate, through which alone private messages to the court were admitted. The sight of him caused the queen's heart to beat quickly, she knew not why.

Scarcely had she resumed her seat, ere her deaf and dumb negro brought her a despatch marked "Secret." She looked at it, murmured the word "Gehanan," and held it for a short while unopened, and then laid it upon a table by her side.

There was surely no cause for apprehension from tidings from the eunuch. It was true he was, as Jezebel supposed, the only living person who knew of her early marriage, for Azalim had assured her that the prophet who united them did not even know her name, still less her parentage and history. But with the death of her Israelite husband, the value of the secret vanished, for the risk of revealing it without proof would have exposed the betrayer to the extremest danger; and this peril had also been neutralized by the generosity of Jezebel to Gehanan, or rather, by her compliance with his threats of blackmail. These, however, were not excessive, for the applicant knew well the ground he stood upon, and was careful not to drive the queen to bay. On this account, therefore, Jezebel had no reason to shrink, as she certainly did, from

making herself acquainted with the contents of his missive.

At length she seized and opened it.

“Great queen,” it began, “thy slave, Gehanan, prostrates himself in the dust at thy feet, which he dares not salute, lest, when thou readest his evil tidings, thou shouldst spurn him away in anger. Thy husband, Azalim, the captive herdsman of Gilead, lives. It was the body of another man, clothed in his garments, whom we discovered in the vineyards of the seacoasts, and thy spouse is now a hopeless leper, wandering in the wilds and deserts. Thy daughter, and his also, lives under the protection of a holy woman, who goes by the name of a princess, being, the Hebrews say, a daughter of the King of kings. The child’s father, I have ascertained, marked her on the shoulder with her name, Astarté, and her birth can thus be traced.

“Great queen, there remains a yet greater danger in thy path. The prophet of Jehovah, who gave thee to wife with the young Gileadite, yet lives, and holds thy secret, and is, doubtless, ready at any moment to sell it to thy lord, the king, who, although a slave to thy beauty and a subject to thy will, may not care to share his kingly crown and nuptial bed with the living wife of a leper, a Syrian captive, and a herdsman. Now, therefore, O queen, take counsel.

Thou hast wisdom and witchcraft on thy side. Lose not an hour, lest thou be put to shame before the servants and concubines of our lord, the king. Thy slave, Gehanan, will guard these, thy secrets, with his life. He hath sought out these truths with all diligence, lest any who are thy enemies should first discover and use them to thy hurt."

Then came the postscript, which, like a woman's, is said to contain the real meaning of the writer.

"Thou knowest, O queen, that thy servant, Gehanan, is faithful, and will keep thy secret, but as it putteth him thereby in great danger, and has laid him, by its discovery, under heavy debt, he prayeth, of thy clemency, to send him three talents of gold and thirty shekels of silver current money with the merchants, also a mule's burden of spices of Arabia, as payment to the merchant for money lent for the queen's service. May the queen live for ever, prayeth her servant Gehanan."

Jezebel read and re-read this letter with bated breath and a beating heart. She no longer had cause to wish that she had a wish, with so many dangers closing around her. Four living witnesses of her mad marriage had come to light, and at any moment her downfall might be accomplished. Completely as Ahab appeared to be under the influence of her stronger will and commanding char-

acter, she knew, none better, that there is no dependence upon a weak man. Moreover, Ahab was intensely proud and keenly sensitive to the ridicule and contempt of public opinion, even in his despotic rule. The fact that his renowned queen had been the wife of a captive slave of Syria, and worse, that this husband was not only still living, but was an outcast leper, crying "Unclean," in the wilderness, would so absolutely have estranged and displeased him, that, even if she escaped death, the instant disgrace of being deprived of all her dignities of wife and queen would be inevitable.

An instinctive consciousness, also, which touched her keenly, told her that when her banishment was effected, Ahab would not only not regret, but would be glad to escape from her rule. She knew he was half-hearted in the religion of Baal, inclining to the worship of the God of his fathers, under the symbolism of the golden calf, and it was only her dominating will, and the fact that the religion of Baal was the universal one in the countries around, that had overcome the king's national inclination to the sin of Jeroboam, and she was sure that, with her deposition, Baal also would be overthrown.

But Jezebel, according to her custom, did not yield without a struggle, or give way to apprehen-

sion and despair, but went at once for aid and counsel to her god.

She sent the gold, silver, and spices, which he had asked, to Gehanan, and gave him a well-paid appointment in the capital of Samaria, which he had not requested, thanking him for his information, and the skill with which he had obtained it, and stating that she had communicated the contents of his letter to King Ahab, who was quite satisfied with the writing of divorcement in her possession, which her former husband, Azalim, had given her before her marriage with the King of Israel.

The astute eunuch smiled scornfully, as he read this explanation. "If this were true, O queen, thou wert not the woman to send me the gold and silver I requested of thee, and the stewardship in Samaria, that I did not ask at thy hand," he murmured, *sotto voce*, to himself.

To attempt the life or liberty of a leper was as difficult as unnecessary, and, for the present, she judged it prudent to make no inquiries as to the locality in which her young daughter was concealed. The peril of discovery lay among the prophets of Jehovah, and her familiar urged their wholesale destruction, not only as of the first importance to Jezebel's own safety, but as the most acceptable service she could offer her master Beelzebub.

Knowing the difficulty and danger attending this great slaughter, the queen eagerly endeavoured to obtain from Moloch the name of the prophet who had united her to Azalim, urging that the spirit must be acquainted with an event which, though privately, was not mysteriously, carried out; but a higher power than that of the demons forbade the revelation, and the familiar could not, if he would, communicate it. Therefore, in her desperation, Jezebel resolved, to use her favourite phrase, the gods should do so to her and more also, if, ere many weeks had passed away, one prophet of Jehovah should have it in his power to publish her secret.

Through the length and breadth of the land, the queen's spies were secretly, but actively, at work, to discover the rendezvous and designs of her intended victims, and many were the surprises and slaughters she planned for their extinction, but the plots were so continually revealed and frustrated, that the queen resolved on a bold stroke, which should, at one blow, destroy the entire flower of the prophets of the Lord.

She dared not do this publicly. Ahab would, as Jezebel well knew, refuse his consent to any overt attack on the worshippers of Jehovah. Therefore she caused reports to reach the king of threatened dangers from the treasons formed, and the discontent

fostered, at the assemblies of the prophets, and, when the fears of Ahab had prepared the way, she hired adventurers, who were ready in Israel, under the name of "Sons of Belial," to inform the king of a false plot to be matured at a conference of the sons of the prophets, to be held within a short distance from Jezreel, and at which the great prophet Elijah was to preside. These men swore by Baal that they had overheard the plan to overthrow and slay the king and his sons, and give the kingdom to a captain of the host, even as Zimri conspired against his master. So artfully did the queen arrange and carry out this intrigue, that she completely succeeded in arousing her husband and obtaining his decree to seize and slay the hundred men about to gather in the vicinity of the city.

In profound secrecy the wily woman managed her purpose. The king, who was fond of the show and glitter of warlike display, often ordered bands, or regiments of his men of war, to present themselves at Jezreel, where he held parades and reviews in a large enclosure near the palace. At the queen's suggestion, he now sent to Samaria, and commanded that a company of three hundred picked men should be sent to Jezreel.

The hundred men of the sons of the prophets had arrived on the eve of the Sabbath at a solitary build-

ing, in which the faithful few who had not bowed the knee to Baal and who had not kissed his image, assembled to pray and expound the law of Moses.

This Sabbath was passed by the prophets in fasting and prayer, for the iniquity of Israel was reaching a climax which tried to the utmost the faith and hope of the servants of Jehovah. There Elijah was to join them on the eve of the first day of the week, and a holy convocation was to be held, and united supplication made, for the perilous state of the land of Israel.

All these plans were known to Jezebel, and yet they had thought them as concealed as she had hitherto considered her own to be unknown.

The bands arrived early on the morn of the first day of the week. The king and queen met them at the entrance of the palace, for Ahab, genial and popular of manner to all, was especially so to his army; the queen graciously invited the captain and his officers to eat at her own table, whilst the men were feasted in the courtyard of the palace, and rest during the noontide heat, after which they were to resume their march.

They were all chosen men of fine appearance, and excellent soldiers. One hundred spearmen, a hundred bowmen, and a hundred swordsmen, with a captain in a chariot to each hundred, and a chief

captain over the whole company. As they assembled to receive their final orders, they were, in truth, a splendid spectacle, with the sun shining upon their steel-scale armour, their glittering helmets and their burnished shields, the lances moving like lightning-flashes, and the keen broadswords gleaming at their sides, and Ahab's heart swelled with kingly pride as he viewed this goodly display of his men of war.

CHAPTER XX.

VACILLATION

“OBADIAH!” The name, in a hushed and hurried voice, roused as thoroughly as if it had been the sound of a trumpet, a man who was sleeping on a low couch in a small pavilion adjoining the palace, who started up and answered, in an equally hushed and hurried manner: “My lord the king! What wilt thou with thy servant?”

“Hist, keep thee silence,” whispered Ahab, closing the door behind him. “Methought I was followed, and ears and eyes seem mortised between the incubles of this ivory house. Hast thou seen the band of men which arrived this morning from the host in Samaria? and knowest thou the work for which they are come?”

“My lord the king,” returned Obadiah, bowing to the earth before his royal master, “as governor of the king’s house, I obeyed the order of the queen to provide food and drink for the goodly men of war who came hither, but as the servant of my lord,

I have not sought to know the purpose for which my lord has appointed them."

"Obadiah," said Ahab, as if changing the subject, or forgetting his first question, "I well know thou fearest the Lord greatly, and thinkest, because for reasons of state I have consented to allow the worship of Baal, I am but as the heathen who know not God, whereas, although in a different manner, I fear the Lord as thou doest."

Obadiah was silent, and the king, after a short pause, again spoke:

"Thou thinkest me an idolator because I bow the knee to the God of Israel in the shape of the golden calf, who brought our fathers out of Egypt, yet thou makest obeisance to me as a king. What is the difference?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: "As a man, I require the assistance of my senses ere I can worship with my heart, and if this is an error, surely Jehovah will pardon it, in consideration of the sincerity of the worshipper."

Still Obadiah kept his silence.

"Speak, answer me," urged Ahab, "and fearlessly, for I will suffer thy words without wrath."

"O king," answered the governor, "I am not careful to answer thee in this manner. It is enough for me that Jehovah permits us to bow ourselves in

reverence to our fellow creatures, but sternly forbids the prostration of the body before any graven image in the act of worship. Ay, even were it the likeness of himself, such action would be the abominable thing his soul hates."

"But if, as I said before, it is offered as a sacrifice of praise," persisted Ahab, "if it increases devotion —"

"O king," interrupted Obadiah, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

The king was displeased as well as silenced by this answer, and, again changing the subject, he spoke in angry haste: "I know not what has led us into this useless dispute; I came to thee on a matter of life and death, and here we are, wasting time over a needless wrangle of modes of worship, in which, after all, one may be as good as another. I came to thee, because I can trust no other man within this palace, and, if it please thee, I will add, I trust thee because I know thou fearest the Lord, and I wished thou shouldst think the same of myself. Now listen. The band of men of war thou hast seen are ordered for the slaughter of a hundred of the prophets of Jehovah, who, with their chief, the seer Elijah, are at present gathered in the synagogue of the college near this city."

Obadiah staggered like one suddenly wounded, at these words, throwing up his arms, and uttering a dull, hoarse cry of horror. The king steadied the tottering frame of his steward, and placed his hand on his shoulder. "Be calm, man," he said, sternly, "and call back thy courage, for it is a matter of immediate peril; the danger presses, and we, or rather thou, must act at once."

Obadiah had recovered now, and ventured to say: "O king, dost thou, who rulest Israel, come to thy servant to act in place of thyself?"

A slight flush of shame came upon Ahab's brow, as he proceeded to explain the particulars of his startling announcement. The queen had discovered a plot to dethrone and slay himself and his sons, and give the crown to a captain of the host; this conspiracy had its origin with the prophets of Jehovah, and was to be carried into effect at this time, in the synagogue of the college.

"It is false," cried Obadiah, his indignation overcoming his respect for his master and his fear of Jezebel. "If the Lord purposed to destroy thee, O king, he would not have determined on this cowardly device for his servants the prophets. It is false, and the queen knows it is as false as they are who invented the tale."

"I believe now that it is false," replied Ahab,

too much in earnest to take offence at his steward's boldness; "but as at the time," he continued, "I credited the report, and signed and sealed the decree, I cannot openly oppose the destruction of these men, which, unless averted at once, will be accomplished ere this day's sun hath gone down."

"But, my lord, oh, let not the king be angry if thy servant asketh of thee what hath changed thy set purpose?"

"As I lay on my couch sleeping, this noon," replied Ahab, "I awoke, to find myself in a thick darkness, out of which a voice thus spoke: 'Save my prophets, or perish with them.' Then the darkness lifted, and there was silence."

"It was the warning of Jehovah," exclaimed Obadiah, reverently prostrating himself with his face to the earth. Then, rising, "My lord, take courage, for the Lord will be on thy side. Reverse the decree. These men of war are at thy command, and the king's word is nay as well as ay."

"I cannot, I will not," cried Ahab, petulantly. "Think how all Israel will gibe and jeer at what they will call my weakness. Knowest thou not how the queen will taunt and tell me of the mockeries of Benhadad, who will jest with the kings, his companions, over their wine-cups, that I am afraid of the God I have forsaken, and make spoil of my

cowardice. No, Obadiah, it is thou must save them; I cannot controvert my given word. Thou must save the prophets."

"My lord, I am at thy disposal. Command thy servant, and I will obey."

"The men of war are even now in the courts of the palace, receiving their last orders from the queen, and the time of rescue is passing by. Send therefore a swift messenger, nay, who canst thou trust—go thyself and warn these men to escape at once and lie hidden until the danger is past. Speed for thy life, for already I hear the stir of departure."

"I will go, my lord, and may the Lord God prosper my way," responded Obadiah. "I will myself saddle an ass so sure of foot it will carry me by a goat-path, a shorter way than any man's feet can go, to the college," and Obadiah hastened to the door.

"Stay," said Ahab, "this cannot be. The queen's spies are all around us, and such a preparation would betray thee. Thou must go alone on foot, and carefully disguised."

"But, my lord, I am slow of foot and heavy; how can I outrun your men?"

"Where is thy trust in God?" was the mocking answer of the king.

Obadiah stood rebuked. The heathen's taunt, for he regarded Ahab as one, strengthened the faith that was ready to perish.

Without a word, only making a profound obeisance to his sovereign, he quitted his presence, put on a garb of an inferior servant, and secretly left the palace.

Whilst Ahab in his trembling fear was stealthily trying to undo the evil he had authorized, Jezebel, dressed in her royal robes, was haranguing the soldiers assembled ready to march in the great court of the ivory house. "Three pieces of gold," she cried, "to every man who brings me the head of a prophet of the Lord, and the weight of it in gold to him who lays at my feet that of Elijah, their master." Then turning to the captain and his officer, she thus addressed them:

"The king will promote you to great honour if not one of these men escape. Slay! Slay" she cried, the red blood flaming through the red paint on her cheeks, "and take heed, ye captains and men of war, that by the morning light one hundred and one heads of the prophets of Jehovah lie upon the marble of this court."

Whilst this communication was passing between Ahab and Obadiah, a miserable being was standing beside a ruined altar in a secluded vale not far

from Jezreel. In the revolt of the ten tribes against the house of David, they also threw off their allegiance to the Lord God of their fathers, and forsook his ordinances. But he did not leave them without witness. The schools of the prophets arose, and they were permitted to offer sacrifices, not according to the law of the priesthood, but after the manner accepted from the patriarchs. The altars thus dedicated were destroyed or overturned by the order of Jezebel, and this one so near the royal city had been completely dismantled. The man alluded to was a leper, suffering from the utmost infection of the dread disease, and ere he dared prostrate, as he desired, before the altar, he uttered the warning cry, "Unclean, Unclean," and then waited for the response from the untainted, "Room for the leper, room."

There was no answer to his challenge, and after a short pause, he sank with his face to the earth, beside the broken stones, and, casting dust upon his head, cried, in the lamentable voice of mingled despair and hope, "Oh, that the plague of my body might suffice for the sin of my soul. Lord God of the fathers, I am vile, and abase myself before thee in dust and ashes."

A voice came clear and distinct in the silence, "Rise, Azalim the leper, thy sins are forgiven thee."

He rose at the command, and stood upright. What had happened? A feeling half fear, half joy, possessed him. What was this strange, new thing that had come so suddenly, so wondrously? He was a leper still. The horrible white flesh hung about him, the diseased bones tottered under him, the putrid blood stagnated in his veins, and yet — his despair was turning to hope, his madness to happiness.

He was another man; a leper, yes, but this was to him a light affliction now that the plague of his heart had been removed, and with peace and joy which almost overwhelmed him, he lay down beneath the shadow of an overspreading tree, and fell asleep, whilst a company of angels sang in joyous harmony over the head of the repentant sinner.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROOM FOR THE LEPERS

SCARCELY had Azalim reposed for a short half-hour, ere another suppliant fell on his knees before the overturned altar. This was Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's palace, who, in response to the terrible information he had received, had set off, disguised, and on foot, to warn the prophets of the coming peril.

But the steward was ill-fitted for the message. Unaccustomed to walking exercise, stout, middle-aged, and necessarily of luxurious habits, Obadiah's strength had already given way, and breathless and exhausted, he scarce could recover sufficient voice from his panting breath to gasp, "O God of thy people Israel, send me a messenger to warn thy holy prophets of their danger."

Again a voice came: "Behold the leper," it said, "send him."

Obadiah looked around. There lay the diseased man under the sheltering tree. Regardless of the

risk, he approached him and cried, "Rise up, thou leper. The Lord God calleth thee."

Azalim opened his eyes and sat up, and without waiting for his question, Obadiah thus addressed him:

"Look below, O leper, and see the men of war whom Jezebel hath sent to destroy my lord Elijah, and the prophets of Jehovah. The word of God hath bid me send thee to warn them, and if thou canst go by yonder goat-path, there is yet time to save them. Bid them fly to the caves of Elburum, and there remain hidden until the search is ended, and say that Obadiah, the king's steward, will feed them there. Go, lose not a moment. See, the host is closing on their prey. There is barely chance of escape."

With a spring like the roe of the mountains, a bound as of the wild ass of the wilderness, a flight such as the eagle directs toward the sun, Azalim leaped forward, and was soon lost to the steward's sight. He rushed, without the leper's cry, into the great hall of the college, which served as the synagogue of the Sabbath, and cried in a voice as of a trumpet:

"In the name of the living God, O thou prophets of Jehovah! escape for your lives to the caves of Elburum! The host of the king is below, sent to

slay you. Fly! Delay not! Listen, there sounds below the trumpet of attack!"

Terrified by this sudden address, more alarmed still at the appearance of Azalim, the followers of Elijah huddled at the other end of the hall, and made no other movement; even their great faith failed at the near proximity of a leper.

"For the value, the love of your lives, fly!" shouted Azalim, in agony of passionate entreaty. "Death is at hand from the sword and the spear. Obadiah hath sent me to you. O God! the chariots of the captains are even now at the foot of the hill, and ye are helpless, unarmed men."

"Our lord Elijah bade us await his coming," said the elder of the prophets; "can we desert him and disobey his order?"

"God will protect his servant," cried Azalim, "and God hath sent me. Beware how ye disobey him by throwing away the lives he would preserve."

These words decided them, and instantly, as if one man, they left the house and fled along the hill toward Elburum. Alas! it was too late. They were seen by the soldiers, who left the road and dashed up the hill to cut off the escape. Unfortunately there was no other way of refuge, save on this exposed hillside.

Azalim looked at this state of things for some

moments, in a kind of paralyzed despair and horror. Then a sudden inspiration came to him. With a succession of leaps, he dropped into the midst of the company of soldiers, and springing into the chariot of the chief captain, he seized the reins from the charioteer, who, with a cry, fell almost headlong to the ground, whilst the rest of the men, with the shout "Room for the leper!" broke their ranks, lost their discipline and rushed this way and that as if not knowing whence to go. In the meanwhile, Azalim twisted the reins so short and tightly around his wrists as to bring the horses nearly on their haunches, and turning his head to the captain, who was about to retreat over the back of the chariot, cried sternly, "Move! and I will follow and embrace thee, and thou shalt be a leper even as I am!"

The captain shrank back in the chariot, trembling with fear. He was one of the bravest men in the host, and never until now had he known what fear was. Then Azalim spoke again.

"Call back thy men and I will turn thy chariot toward Jezebel, and bid them follow thee!" Seeing the chief hesitate, he added, "If thou refusest, I will rain my kisses on thy mouth as a woman in love, and the poison of my blood shall enter into thee, and we will call 'Unclean' together for evermore."

There was no hesitation now. A halt was called,

the men formed anew, with their faces to Jezreel; Azalim turned the captain's chariot in the same direction, and then again spoke:

"Swear to me by Jehovah, and on thine own soul, that thou wilt not turn again to pursue the prophets of the Lord, nor in any way hinder their flight. Swear, on thy life."

With quivering lips the captain took the oath. He was in a great strait. With the fear of Jezebel on the one hand, and the greater fear of the leprosy on the other, he chose the lesser evil.

"Now return to the woman who sent you," said Azalim to him, "and to the man she calls her husband," he added, with a bitter sneer, — "that fool, who, for the sins of Israel, she calls her king, — and tell her that Jehovah has sent his leper to save his prophets, and that they have escaped beyond her power to harm."

Azalim flung the reins over the horses, and leapt down from the chariot. The captain followed, and ascended the chariot next in command, his own being abandoned for fear of infection, and, dejected and crestfallen, the company turned slowly toward Jezreel.

Azalim, exhausted, faint with hunger, fatigue, and excitement, and parched with thirst, stooped down to drink at a pool of water, which lay placid

and invitingly cool at his feet. As he drank, his spirit revived, and he rose up refreshed and reinvigorated, and was about to start on his journey to his leper's home, when a voice near by startled him with the words:

"Behold, thou art clean!"

He turned, in mute astonishment, to see Elijah standing beside him. He fell on his face before the prophet, and in speechless amazement and joy embraced his knees, and kissed the hem of his garment.

"All peace be on thee, my son," said Elijah, laying his hand upon the head of Azalim. "When thou madest confession of thy sin, thy soul was pardoned, and when thou saved the prophets of Jehovah, thy body was cleansed. Henceforth, the Spirit of the Most High shall rest upon thee for evermore. Go in peace."

"I will never leave thee, my lord, my father," replied Azalim. "Take me for thy servant, and receive from me the fidelity of a son. No, as the Lord God liveth, I will never again leave thee until death divide us."

"Be it so," assented the prophet, "yet, hear —" Suddenly he broke off. "See," he exclaimed, "the traitor captain hath recalled his men."

It was true. The bands had turned back in full pursuit of the fugitives.

As with one long step, Elijah stood before the chariot of the chief. "Thou hast lied unto thy God," he cried. "Be thou a leper until the day of thy death."

The captain fell down in his chariot, a leper as white as snow, and the soldiers of Jezebel, terrified at the prospect of meeting her, or of remaining on this doomed spot, fled back in confusion to Samaria, echoing, as they went, the panic cry: "Room for the leper, room!"

When the bands had disappeared on the road to the capital, Elijah came back to Azalim, who was still standing wrapt in mingled rapture and wonder at what had happened to him. "My son," said the prophet, "thy soul has been forgiven its sin, thy mind released from its torment, thy body cleansed from its disease. Give glory to the God of Israel, and after thou hast obtained clothing, food, and rest in the school of the prophets, gird up thy loins for the journey to Jerusalem, where, in the temple of the great King, thou shalt make thy peace-offering, and pass through the cleansing cure of the leper."

"My lord," replied Azalim, kneeling at the seer's feet, "I supplicate thee not to dismiss me from thy

presence. Let me be thy servant and thy son, until the hand of death divide thee and me."

A strange expression passed over the features of Elijah at these words, but it quickly passed. "The future is not for us to predict or promise, my son, except when revealed, and life and death are in the hands of God. Do as I have directed thee. In a chamber above the chief door of the college, thou wilt find all thou requirest for thy travel to the holy city. At earliest sunset on the morrow, I will accompany thee a day's journey on thy way. Till then, go in peace."

When, the next morn, Azalim joined the prophet, a finer example of an Israelite could scarcely have been found within the boundaries of the promised land. In youth, he had outstripped the young men of his nation in comeliness, and now, in his early middle age, it would have been difficult to have found a rival. His form was rather fuller, yet as athletic, and almost as alert, as when he seemed to emulate the agility of his herds. The young, bright eye was keener, deeper of expression, the features more finely cut, and the deep trial and suffering of Azalim's life had imparted an intellect and dignity to his port and manner, which, in its grave, calm quietude, imparted a strong interest in

those with whom he associated. Elijah's rapid glance at their meeting bespoke his pleasure and approbation at the impression his young kinsman had made on him, and he saluted him with a degree of warmth rarely accorded to his company.

They parted at sunset. Azalim performed all the ceremonies of the temple and the law, and then returned to Gilead, where he became the devoted servant of the prophet. His love and fidelity to his master were perfect. He spared him all anxiety. He provided for all his wants. He guarded his privacy. He watched over his safety. He listened to his teachings, and he humbly strove to follow the example of his exalted life.

So the years rolled on, and to Azalim it seemed as if he had entered into another life. The possession of perfect health and strength and liberty of action, the equality with his kind, the very breath of heaven's free air in his own breast, all combined to render his days like one long holiday of joy and pleasure. His deep reverence and strong affection for the great prophet made his services a delight, and gave an object for his labour; and the visitations of Elijah to the sons of the prophets, and to the hidden faithful of the land afforded change and brightness to the days as they passed.

The cloud had turned its silver lining over Aza-

lim's head, but it is in the nature of the clouds that canopy this earth of ours, to turn the other, and darker side, upon its inhabitants, and presently a change came over the prophet and upon his servant.

The iniquity of Israel had spread like a plague over the land. The worship of Baal, instigated by Jezebel, was universally accepted without a sign of protest, at the command of the king. Every altar of Jehovah had been cast down. Every college of the prophets was shut up, and violent robbery and injustice of every kind prevailed throughout the ten tribes of the revolt. Well might the mighty prophet say now, as he did afterward, "I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away."

Singular as it may appear, it was a fact that, in all these long years, neither the queen nor the prophet had met or knew the strange connection of that secret marriage which had brought them together. Elijah had confronted and rebuked Ahab more than once or twice already, but never yet in the presence of his dominating wife; and Jezebel had pursued, threatened, and bribed, with almost his weight in gold, to compass his destruction, for he alone, in Israel, stood forth fearlessly to confess his God, and to rebuke the universal wickedness of his people.

Partly from fear and shame, and partly from the

promise which he had given to Jezebel and still respected, Azalim had never revealed the fatal history of his marriage, or the identity of his bride, to Elijah.

For months the prophet had led a life of the utmost seclusion, as severe as any hermit of the Thebaid. Prayers, vigils, and fastings, were offered without ceasing, and in mingled awe and wonder the faithful servant watched and waited, not with unfailing faith, it must be said, for no sign in the sky, on the earth, or under it, came in response to the earnest prayers offered up in that lone cave of the wilderness.

Soon after the acceptance of Azalim's services by the prophet, one of the progresses of the latter took them to the house of Zillah. The joy of the two friends at the restoration of Azalim needs no description, — it was further heightened on his part by the recognition of the young Astarté, as his daughter. She had grown into a lovely childhood, and bade fair to imitate and emulate the disposition as well as the beauty of her adopted mother.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MESSAGE

THE famine was sore in the land. No rain-charged clouds gathered under the brazen sky. No mists arose from the iron-bound earth. If a blade of vegetation could have pierced its surface, there would have been no moisture below to nourish its roots. Insect and vegetable life had vanished from the ground. The birds fell famished from the leafless forest boughs, and their bodies were scarce worth the plucking for food to those who picked them up. The beasts were slaughtered because there was no fodder to keep them alive, and in the fields and highways the human dead lay unburied and unnoticed, for they were but fleshless skeletons covered with skin that was scorched to a mummy dryness by the merciless heat of the sun's fierce rays.

Six months only had passed, and three more years of this deadly dearth were yet to come, and still the doomed people, and their weak, obstinate

ruler, humbled not themselves before the mighty hand that had so sorely smitten them.

The worship of Baal had increased rather than diminished in popularity since the famine, for the priests promised, in his name, speedy relief, and bowed, prostrated, supplicated, and cut themselves, after their manner, in the hope that blood would propitiate their deity, whose only answer was to empty upon them the stored-up volcanoes of his flames, and scorch them with a sevenfold degree of increased heat.

Ahab gave no sign of repentance, for, personally, the famine did not seriously affect him or his family. Indeed, in the palace of Jezreel the calamity was but lightly, if at all, felt. The drought was confined to the land of Israel, and to the adjoining coasts and countries in which the religion of Baal was established. Judah was exempt, as also was Egypt, and from these countries, chiefly from the latter, secretly, and by night, dried meats, fruit, corn, and other portable foodstuffs, were conveyed to the ivory house of the king and queen, and privately stored in the vaults and towers, whilst the retinue was reduced to the service absolutely necessary for the personal wants of royalty, and that of the prophets of the groves who ate at Jezebel's table.

Obadiah was still the governor of the palace.

The queen hated him as she once did Gehanan, and had, in like manner, endeavoured to compass his disgrace, even going so far on one occasion as to threaten Ahab with the alternative of losing her, or giving up the steward. But the king, with all his weakness, now and then exhibited a soft obstinacy, and at this hint, showed such an alarming inclination to retain his governor that the queen immediately dropped the subject, and Obadiah remained in undisputed possession of his post.

During the famine, the king gave the entire direction and storage of the provisions into his hands, with unrestricted permission to feed his own family, who lived in Jezreel, and any particular friends in want he might choose to succour. Obadiah gladly availed himself of the privilege, and maintained alive the few remaining prophets and servants of Jehovah who were in concealment from the persecution of Jezebel.

The great Elijah and his servant had been provided with food by Obadiah, but the former had been commanded to take refuge by the brook Cherith, and to the almost despairing grief of Azalim, his master was now about to depart. They were eating their last meal together, when the sorrow of the faithful servitor broke forth in an exceeding bitter exclamation:

“My father, my father! Let me go with thee, or I die!”

“It cannot be, my son. The word bids me go alone.”

“And I, whither can I go? When I left thee, as a captive, in Damascus, I fell into grievous sin, and was for long years a leper; and now thou leavest me, I shall sin again, and renew my chastisement.”

“Never, my son,” returned the prophet; “thou wilt sin again, as every son of man will until death, but the spirit of the living God is with thee now, and thou wilt not remain in it. But say no more. Our path is to obey, not to inquire. To trust, not to despair. Tarry thou here until thou receivest a message from me which shall tell thee what thou must do.”

Then Elijah raised his hands, and, holding them over the bent head of his adopted son, blessed him in the name of the Lord. Neither trusted himself to say a word of farewell. The prophet girded himself for the journey, slung a cruse of water and a wallet containing bread over his shoulder, and departed.

As if to fill up the measure of Azalim's distress, the very day after his master had left him, sorrowful news came from Zillah. The young maiden Astarté

had mysteriously and suddenly disappeared. She had been gathering fruit in the orchards of the white house and did not return. The most diligent search had been made for her, and every inquiry set on foot, but not the slightest clue could be obtained. No one had seen or heard of her. A despairing apprehension fell upon the sorrowing father. What if the cruel queen had discovered and kidnapped the unhappy maiden?

Several weeks passed, and no message from his master came to the desolate Azalim. After dark each night, he went to the appointed place to find the portion of food provided for him by Obadiah, hoping to hear some tidings through the governor, and each time he was disappointed.

One evening, on nearing the tree in the hollow trunk of which his daily meal was deposited, he perceived two ravens perched above in one of its branches. His spirits sank at the sight. Doubtless these birds of prey had discovered and devoured his hoped-for supper. None but one who is living in a state of semi-starvation could understand the dismay the loss of the meal would cause, nor be able to appreciate his joy, when, on unfolding the cloth, he found not only the contents untouched, but the unusual addition of a piece of goat's flesh and a large bunch of raisins.

Placing the provisions in a bag in his girdle, and hiding the cloth in the tree, he was about to go home when a loud cry from above his head caused him to look up at the birds, who were still perched on the tree.

They were flying from bough to bough, and it seemed as if they wished to attract his attention, for as he looked they flew to another tree, and so on, until, tired of the apparently useless game, he sat down and began eating his supper, when the birds, who, strange to say, were plump and well-fed, remained quietly above him, and made no attempt to seek the crumbs which fell from his meal.

This conduct appeared so singular to Azalim that he resolved to follow, or at least observe the direction in which the ravens flew.

The birds lent themselves to his wish. They flew and perched and flew again, and Azalim, becoming interested, followed on and on, until they came to a small brook-tributary of the Jordan, when they flew away.

Azalim followed the course of the brook for awhile and at last his journey gained its reward, for on a bank beside the water lay a folded paper, the appearance of which filled him with a surprise almost akin to fear. Recovering himself, he picked

up the paper, unfolded it and read the following words:

“To Azalim, my son. Go, hire thyself as servant to Obadiah at the house of Ahab, King of Israel.
ELIJAH.”

Azalim let the paper fall from his trembling hand in astonishment. Go to the house of Ahab, where the woman dwelt who had wrought such sin upon his soul, such awful ruin to his body! The wife, who was the titular queen of the king of his country, yet still *his* wife and none other's. His wife, who had played the king false, as she had played him false, for the tales which had met his ear concerning her, made his ears tingle and his cheek flush with shame that she was his wife; yet, such was still the fatal power of this evil woman over him, he was filled with a great fear lest he should be unable to escape her witchcrafts, and fall under her influence again.

He sat down beside the brook and rested his head in his hands. He recalled the dreadful past, and shuddered at the threatening future.

“God of my fathers,” he groaned, “why hast thou so dealt with me?”

The why and the wherefore of rebellious inquiry

rose surging within him, and as no answer was possible to the supplication, a keen, bitter feeling of despair filled his soul, and he almost resolved to disobey the command of the great prophet, and refuse to enter her accursed palace.

Azalim returned to his home, and resolved to go to Obadiah, show him the prophet's letter, and abide by his decision, and at early dawn he departed for Jezreel.

"From my lord Elijah," cried Obadiah, taking the paper, "the God of Israel be praised that he is safe."

When he had read the few words, he exclaimed, joyfully: "Thou art welcome, my son. I needed help like thine. Thy bread shall be given and thy water sure, until my lord the prophet returns to claim thee!"

But Azalim spoke not a word.

"What ails thee?" said Obadiah, surprised, and then looking more closely at his visitor, he marked the ashy pallor of his face, the sunken jaw, the limbs scarce able to keep upright, and an expression of wild anxiety on the features. "Ah!" he cried, "food, rest, peace of mind are failing thee," and, as he spoke, he gathered together some mats and pillows and arranged them hastily as a couch on which he made Azalim recline, and giving him a

strong cordial to restore strength at once, left him to procure food, and would not suffer a word of explanation until his guest had eaten.

"Now, my son," said Obadiah, "tell me all that is on thy mind, for I perceive that a heavy weight is still upon it."

"Ere I speak another word," replied Azalim, "swear by the Lord God of our fathers that thou wilt not reveal to a living soul the things I am about to tell thee."

Obadiah took the required oath.

"Now, bar the door, close the lattice and come near to me," whispered Azalim, "and I will tell my tale, at which thou wilt marvel, and understand the reason of my seeking counsel."

Then, for the first time, he related the story of his own life, from the day he was taken prisoner by the Syrian band, until that on which he was cleansed from the leprosy and became Elijah's servant.

The astonishment of Obadiah was only exceeded by his joy at the tidings of the false position of the queen. He removed his shoes from his feet and stood up in the attitude of prayer, "Glory be to the Lord God of Israel," he ejaculated, reverently, "who has thus brought about the deliverance of his people from the yoke of this wicked woman! Arise, Azalim. Let us at once go to my lord the king. Ahab

is proud as Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, and I mistake me if he is not tired at times of the dominion of his false wife."

"No," responded Azalim, laying a detaining hand upon the governor's arm, "it cannot be. This matter must be kept secret for the command came to the great prophet, 'Let her alone! She is to fill up the measure of her guilt unchecked, and then the vengeance is to be the Lord's.'"

"His ways are not our ways," responded Obadiah, reverently, "and as he hath directed thee here, thou must come, and trust that the great God of heaven will guard thy life from the wicked hands of this daughter of Beelzebub."

"It is not that which I fear," and Azalim spoke in a low, scared voice.

"What worse can there be, my son?"

"That she may lead me a willing slave, into the ranks of the enemies of the living God. Obadiah, thou knowest her witchcrafts that they are many, but thou dost not know the awful sway she wields over the very souls of men, and I tell thee that if, at this moment, she chose to exert that power, I fear, nay, I believe that I should yield and be lost. How, then, dare I thus throw myself in her way."

The steward at first looked incredulous, then

grave, then his brow cleared, and he said, emphatically:

"Thou hast no choice but to obey, my son, and must leave the result to God, who sends thee hither; I will take care that the false queen and yourself do not meet. Put your trust in the God of our fathers, and believe he hath a purpose for your good in this command."

"I have no strength to oppose or resist her," observed Azalim, despondingly.

"Did not Joseph resist the wicked Zuleika?" remonstrated Obadiah.

"But he fled from her," retorted Azalim.

"Fled from her, but not from the house, for there his duty lay," answered the steward. "Do not mistrust Jehovah, my son. He hath not brought thee here without good reason, and most certainly not to deliver thee into the hands of Jezebel."

Azalim took courage from the words of Obadiah, and thus strangely the husband and wife were, after long years, brought together again under the same roof.

To avoid the queen's recognition, the governor advised Azalim to adopt the garb of an Assyrian, and have his hair and beard dressed in stiff, long curls, after the mode of that country. Azalim, having renewed his vows of the Nazarite, easily assumed

the fashion, which greatly became his fine person, and as he affected an ignorance of the Israelite language, the risk of being detected by his voice was avoided.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ASTARTÉ

AZALIM had not been long in the palace ere he made a terrible discovery.

One day he was engaged alone in examining stores in the cellarage of the buildings, when he heard loud cries for help, mixed with groans, as if from some one in great danger and suffering. He hastened along a narrow passage toward the sounds, and found that they proceeded from underground, and that the voice was that of a woman, or rather, of a very young maiden. His further progress was barred by a bolted door, and he hurried in search of Obadiah, to whom he at once communicated the discovery.

“Alas!” exclaimed the governor, sorrowfully, “the dungeons of this ivory house are filled with the victims of this accursed woman and her priests.”

Without further explanation, Obadiah followed Azalim, and when he came to the closed door, he said: “This is the opening over the prisons. One

only can venture farther, my son. Abide thee here, and I will find out the meaning of this outrage."

He entered, and quietly closed the door upon Azalim. The cries came only at intervals now, and weaker. A miserable suspicion came upon Azalim, and he could scarcely endure the impatience and anxiety that possessed him.

At last Obadiah returned. His face more resembled a corpse than a living man, and upon it was impressed a look of inexpressible horror. He beckoned to Azalim to follow him, and when he reached his own apartment, shut and bolted the door, and, falling half unconsciously on a divan, he covered his face with his hands, and groaned as in agony.

Recovering himself, he said, under his breath :

"I looked through the bars above one of the dungeons, and there I saw two of the priests of Baal, who had brought with them an image of their god, and a brazier full of live coals." He stopped.

"What else?" whispered Azalim, hoarsely.

"A young maiden, very young, almost a child, chained, half-starved, half-clothed, with the marks of blows on her person, stood beside them, and boldly refused to obey their command to bow before the idol and kiss its foot."

"Go on," said Azalim, in a voice of suppressed anguish.

“One of the men,” continued the governor, “a Syrian, thus addressed her: ‘Hear, thou child of an Israelite dog, the Queen of Israel, angered at thy refusal to renounce Jehovah, hath given thee into our hands to conquer thy obstinacy. We, therefore, give thee thy choice. Prostrate thee to Baal, and own him for god, and thou shalt be decked in scarlet and pearls, and become a dancing and singing woman of the pleasures of the groves. Refuse, and thy hand shall be consumed in this flame. Choose Baal or the fire.’”

“What was her choice?” whispered Azalim.

“She held out her hand over the brazier, this brave and holy maid,” answered the governor, “and said, in a loud, clear voice, ‘The fire,’ and then —”

“Then?” repeated Azalim.

“The two sons of Baal seized her hand, and —”

“Say no more,” cried Azalim, in a frenzy of passion. “Oh, Obadiah,” he added, smiting his breast in agony, “I feel convinced this maiden is my daughter! What can we do to save her?” he added, in an accent of utter hopelessness.

“Watch and wait,” was the reply.

There was not much that escaped the knowledge of the queen, either in the house of Jezreel or the

land of Israel. She soon heard of the Assyrian who assisted the steward, and the very day after the discovery of the prisoner in the dungeon, an order came from the queen that the Assyrian should present himself before her, with a list of the latest Egyptian consignments. With the view of a better concealment, it was given out that, although the foreign servant could understand the Hebrew language, he was unable to speak it, and this circumstance was mentioned to the queen.

When Azalim entered her presence, he bowed to the ground, as he presented his lists, placed his finger on his lips as he rose, in sign of his enforced silence, and stood facing her, awaiting further commands.

There was no recognition in the bold, approving look with which the lawless woman regarded him. Years before she had fallen in love at first sight with the well-favoured, youthful Gileadite, and now she experienced as instantaneous a fancy for the goodly Assyrian, standing before her in the unequalled perfection of a magnificent manhood. She was unaccustomed to forego or delay her inclinations, and, with a flattering speech, implying the impression he had made on her, bade him return to Obadiah, and tell him the queen claimed his servant for her own.

"Her servant," repeated Obadiah, scornfully,

who knew Jezebel too well not to comprehend the meaning of the term; "was there ever a stranger thing than this, O Azalim, where a wife selects her husband to break her marriage vows?"

Jezebel was not long in paying the same court to Azalim the man, which she had so cunningly offered to Azalim the youth. "Have I not a right to consult my own affections now?" she said to him. "I have given children to Ahab and Israel, I have governed his country, I have lived for his welfare. Have I then, at last, no right to follow my own inclinations?" She paused, and looked appealingly at him, for something in his look and attitude checked further speech.

He stood with his arms folded, a little bent forward, with compressed lips and frowning brow, and a look in his eyes which, in her preoccupation, she did not observe. As he made neither sign nor movement, she went on:

"I see thou dost not quite understand me, Assyrian; I will speak slower. I am about to choose thee for my favourite, and will shower gifts of silver and gold and slaves, and all pomp and luxury upon thee, and thou shalt bask in the affection of her who is acknowledged to be the most beautiful, not only of queens, but of women."

He again made no reply.

“Oh, speak, Assyrian,” she cried, impatiently, “surely thou canst say one word of comprehension. Thou canst at least, pronounce the name of Jezebel.”

His arms fell to his sides, his features relaxed, and in a voice which rang through the room, he did pronounce the name:

“Jezebel!”

She knew him now; her eyes were opened. Shame came to the shameless, fear to the fearless woman, and with quivering lips, she uttered the words, “I was told that thou wert a leper, Azalim.”

“False wife, unnatural mother! It would be but thy deserts to denounce thee to the king, and hurl thee to destruction, but deliver up my child to me, and refrain from molesting us in the future, and I will leave thee to the judgment of Jehovah. Haste thee, Jezebel, summon Obadiah, and give to him the order of deliverance from the dungeon, or I will reveal myself to Ahab, and thy doom is certain.”

She obeyed, sent for the governor, and gave him the authority to release the imprisoned maiden.

“My son,” said the governor to Azalim, when they had quitted Jezebel’s presence, “the purpose of the Lord, in ordering thee to come to the house of Ahab, was very dark to thee, and tried thy faith sorely. Dost thou see it now?”

“ I sinned in doubting it,” replied Azalim, humbly.

“ Let it strengthen thy faith for the future, my son,” said Obadiah.

The young Astarté was taken to the house of the steward in Jezreel, and there tenderly cared for until she was sufficiently recovered to travel with her father to the house of her adopted mother Zillah. Phanuel's wealth protected his daughter from want during the famine, and enabled her still to feed the lepers, and for some months her extreme care and devotion prolonged the life of the martyred Astarté. Suddenly there was a relapse, and all hope fled; she faded as rapidly as a plucked flower, and one night she asked to be left alone for awhile, as she wished to sleep in quiet. Zillah complied, but remained at the door of the chamber, watching. After a time she heard low voices within. An unaccountable solemnity came over her, and she sent for Azalim, who was lodging at her overseer's, in order to be near at hand should any change come suddenly to the cherished child. Zillah quietly opened the door; Astarté's bed had been removed to the opening of the lattice railing, to give air to the young sufferer, and, bending over her, they saw a form of dazzling radiance supporting and comforting Astarté, on whose features rested such a light, that the father and adopted mother fell on their knees at the portal,

not daring to approach. The celestial visitant gently laid the child back on the bed, and floated through the open casement toward a light in the midnight sky, from which came the echoes of a music sweeter than they had ever heard on earth, and it appeared to them that the bright vision folded something precious within its silvery pinions.

A cloud closed over the opening, and then the two entered the chamber, to see the beloved child lying calm and beautiful in mortality's last sleep.

"She is lost to us for ever," said the father, with a stifled groan.

"Nay, my friend," replied Zillah, softly, "'tis but a little time ere thou and I will follow and find her."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WARNING

“RISE up, thou King of Israel; why liest thou thus stricken as thou wert sick, or beaten by thine enemies, or cast from thy throne by revolting subjects; what ailest thee, to lie thus, like a beaten child or thwarted woman?”

A woman of regal beauty, dressed in royal embroidered robes, with a jewelled crown upon her head, thus addressed a man lying upon a couch, unwashed, unshorn, unshaven, who turned peevishly from food that had been brought to him, and was actually whimpering like a baby.

He did not answer or notice her, but turned his face to the wall.

“Speak,” she said, imperiously stamping her foot on the floor. “What troubles thee, Ahab? A king can have none that cannot be removed. Speak.”

“I am no king,” almost whined the man on the couch, half turning his head around to her. “It is not seemly any man should own land near a king’s

palace, and I offered Naboth the value he chose to put upon it, for the vineyard that lies below the nearest watch-tower, and he refused because some old law of Moses forbade selling his father's inheritance. Do not call me a king, O queen, when I am thus impotent of power."

"I will be thy king," she laughed. "I will give thee the vineyard thou desirest. It is not the first time, O husband, thou hast found thy king in Jezebel. Arise, and wash thy face, and anoint thy head, for the vineyard is already thine."

So King Ahab, who had been spoilt as a child by the women of his father's palace, and retained in manhood the results of this rearing, suffered himself to be thus half scolded, half coaxed, and did arise and eat and drink and bathe and was merry, and gave his seat into Jezebel's hands, and trusted the matter to her guidance.

As time went on, the queen had given herself more and more to the witchcraft which had so tempted her youth, and she had built a pavilion in the gardens of the palace, in which she carried on her arts with more secrecy and security than she could have done in the palace itself.

Locks and bolts and closed doors were not among the necessities of life three thousand years ago, nor do closed doors suit hot climates; yet it would not

have suited the queen that her pavilion should be open to all comers. There was no visible door to it; air and coolness were secured by lattices open high in the walls, and it was approached through a small maze of trees, known only to herself, leading downward to an entrance below the building; to this place, Jezebel and her dog came at night, when the king was feasting with his courtiers.

The pavilion was curiously, sparingly furnished, — a table, with the writing materials of the period, a stool, an altar, and image of Baal was all. The caldrons, braziers, and fumigators of incantation which filled the place might be called the accessories of her trade of witchcraft.

A lamp hung from the ceiling; Jezebel lowered it by a chain, and lifted the light. Then she sat down at the table, Moloch crouching by her side, and began her letters to the authorities of Jezreel, commanding the murder of Naboth. She finished all but the seal and signature, and then rose wearily, and spoke to Moloch.

“Let us come, my faithful slave, and see this wonderful plot of ground, the denial of which,” she added, with a sneer, “has brought tears into the eyes of the King of Israel and the husband of Jezebel.”

All was silent in the palace gardens, as the queen

and her dog guardian emerged from the maze, and took their way to the vineyard of Naboth. The stars shone with sufficient brightness to enable her to see every object distinctly. She reached the vineyard, to find it surrounded with a fence, in which there appeared to be no opening. She ordered Moloch to find one, and he contrived to force a hole, which enabled his mistress to enter without much difficulty.

Jezebel looked around; a feeling of contempt toward the king filled her mind as she marked the small extent and careless keeping of the vineyard. Being in the midst of the king's gardens, Naboth had neither cared nor been able to give it the attention it would otherwise have received. In truth, it was not the value of the vineyard, but the obedience to the law which prompted his refusal to the king.

Jezebel laughed, and then spoke aloud. "So it was for this miserable plot that my royal baby has been shedding tears, and to obtain this paltry prize I am about to lie and seize and slay."

She paced impatiently up the path, overgrown with straggling roots and arched with unpruned tendrils, and then she stopped, and again spoke.

"Ye gods, what more important affairs occupied you when Ethbaal's child was sent into ex-

istence? Ah! if I had been a man, the world should have rung with my name, but a woman can only rule, like a familiar spirit, in another form than her own, through a man, and that man must be a fool to be her vehicle. Come, Moloch, let us be going. We must get the price ready to pay for the toy of thy mistress' master, my faithful fellow."

She led the way to the broken opening by which she had entered, and when she reached it, started and fell back upon Moloch, who uttered a low howl, half fear, half defiance.

Before her, in the open gap, stood a figure of a man, whom in a moment she recognized as the prophet who had given her to the young Israelitish captive to wife. A cold chill penetrated like a dagger blade to her heart. Who was he? Why had he come to her? What did he want? Yes, she knew him, and she saw that he knew her, although long years had passed since that memorable day when she and her young lover stood before him, and both he and herself were now well on in middle age. Her confusion was increased by seeing that a little behind the figure that confronted her, Azalim stood calm and motionless.

She was still woman enough to feel a flush of shame rise to her forehead at the reappearance of a husband whom she had solicited to be her para-

mour, but the fear of the man before her overcame any inferior emotion, and in a tone which she strove to be one of haughty defiance, but which quavered with apprehension, she inquired:

“Who art thou?”

He did not answer at once, but gazed steadily at her; she returned the glance, and the eyes of these two met again as they had done before by the banks of the Jordan, — in deep antagonism.

“Who art thou?” she repeated.

“I am Elijah, the Tishbite,” he answered.

“Then, — by the gods,” she cried, recovering courage in the excess of fury which came to her with the announcement of his name, but he sternly interrupted her.

“Silence, woman,” he said, “thy rage is harmless. I no longer fly from thy threats, nor am I now before thee as an avenger, but as a messenger of offered mercy and pardon by the word of the Lord God of Israel!”

“I am the servant of Beelzebub,” she answered, scornfully. “I want neither mercy nor pardon at the hand of thy god.”

“Nay,” returned the prophet, “hear me deliver the message sent to thee. Thou art about to commit a sin which will fill up the measure of thy iniquities and shut the door of forgiveness against

thee for ever. Pause ere thou shedd'st the innocent blood for which thou wert preparing in yonder pavilion, and thou mayst yet escape the ruin that lies before thee. Thou hast sinned grievously, O daughter of Ethbaal, yet, as it has been greatly in ignorance, Jehovah will have pity, and spare thee if thou turn from the evil of thy ways."

"I am sold to Beelzebub," she murmured, almost humbly. There was a force, a command, and yet a compassion in the voice and look of the prophet which moved even her hard and wicked nature.

"Jehovah is greater than Beelzebub, and he can deliver thee out of his hand. But, O woman! I warn thee not to hesitate or delay. Destroy those accursed papers. Leave the man whom thou know'st is not thy lawful husband. Turn from thy gods of wood and stone, and yet thou mayst escape the death for evermore."

He did not wait for a response, but turning away, rejoined Azalim, and was soon out of sight, leaving Jezebel looking after them dismayed and irresolute.

At last, she left the vineyard, and followed by Moloch, returned to the pavilion. All was as she had left it. The letters she had written lay worthless at present on the table, for they were unsigned, unsealed. She seated herself, and tak-

ing one up, looked at it vacantly. Her mind was full of hesitation and perplexity. No human being is so callous as not sometimes to soften, none so wicked as not at times to wish to be better, and Jezebel, who perhaps was as bad, or even worse than any woman before or after her, had been touched and moved to the very centre of her being by the warning of Elijah. Yes, she feared it might be so. Jehovah was more powerful than Beelzebub, and if so —

Moved by an uncontrollable impulse, she gathered up the letters, and approaching a brazier prepared for burning, she lighted it, and was about to place the papers on the flame, when the low growl and half whine from Moloch, which denoted the possession of a familiar, arrested the action, and with the letters still in her hand, she resumed her seat. Moloch took up his position, and the familiar spoke:

“Daughter of Ethbaal, thou hast gone too far to draw back. Thou belongest to the prince, and even if he would let thee go, consider that thou must sacrifice all thou hast gained hitherto, if thou heedest the deceitful, lying words of the mad prophet. ‘Give up the false husband,’ he cries; that is to say give up being a queen and all the great and good things that attend thy royalty. ‘Give up thy gods,’

he commands. Dost thou remember the scroll in the young Levite's chamber? 'Thou shalt not' to all the pleasures of life thou lovest, for that is what thy new god will require thee. Is not the sovereignty of Beelzebub better than that?"

Before the familiar had finished, all good impulses had fallen away from Jezebel. Give up her rank, power, wealth, and become the wife of the servant of the prophet who had perhaps deceived her? Give up her gods, who permitted all unlicensed pleasures, for one who forbids everything for the sake of the rewards of a future existence, which, perchance, is but a fable after all?

"No, Moloch," she cried, rising as she spoke. "The die is cast. I am no traitor, I choose Beelzebub."

She reseated herself, drew pen and inkhorn toward her, spread the letters smoothly, and with dexterous imitation signed Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal.

CHAPTER XXV.

RAMOTH - GILEAD

THE battle has raged all day at Ramoth-Gilead, and the King of Israel, wounded at its commencement and driven out of the host, has been slowly dying all the long hours since, and now, supported in his chariot by his servants, seemed as though ready to expire with the sunset. A great restlessness had come over him, and his people inquired if they could do him any service to remove it.

“Ay,” replied Ahab. “Find me Gehanan the eunuch. He came yesternight with letters from the queen, and must be near at hand.”

He was not far off and was soon beside the dying monarch.

Ahab had never liked or trusted Gehanan, and had often opposed the queen's attempts to place him in important offices of state, and the eunuch, who was quite aware of this distaste in the royal mind, cherished a secret revenge against the king

which had long craved satisfaction. So strong was his malice, that even the sight of the sufferer at his side did not soften it. He saluted with his usual servility and awaited the sovereign's command.

"Gehanan," the king spoke in low and broken tones, yet with an earnest clearness which showed how deeply he felt what he was saying. "The hand of death is on me, and I desire thee to take my last message to the queen, thy mistress. Tell her that as in life she alone was my wife, as on the throne she only was my queen, so in death she is the only woman who holds a place in my heart, or my memory. She, the Princess of Tyre and Sidon, was a fit mate for the King of Israel by rank. She, the priceless woman in beauty and in brain, was alone fitted to be his equal as wife —"

He paused to regain breath, and when speech returned, took a letter stained with blood from his breast and pressed it to his lips, —

"Tell Jezebel, the queen," he sighed, "that the last act of her husband and her king was to kiss the name of his queen and his wife."

During this message, which was uttered with the panting passion of ebbing life and intense human feeling, a malignant scowl flamed on the face of Gehanan, and when Ahab stopped and sank back

into the arms of his attendants, his vengeful spirit could be no longer restrained.

"Great king," he exclaimed, the venom in his eyes expressed in his voice, "to whom shall I take thy message, for she to whom thou didst bid me give it, is neither thy wife nor thy queen."

"Thou liest, slave," cried Ahab, raising himself as if restored to life, and speaking in a voice of strong emotion. "Thy words are as blasphemy to the gods, and as I still live a king, thou shalt pay for them with thy life."

"Stay, but hear me O king. Wouldst thou have proof of the truth of my words ere I die?"

The king's weakness had returned. He only waved his hands.

"Jezebel, the daughter of the once high priest of Baalbec, was, before her mock marriage with thee, O king, the wife of a Syrian slave, who was for years a leper of the desert, and is now the servant of the great prophet Elijah. She has never been even thy concubine, O king. Her husband, Azalim by name, refused her a writing of divorcement, and she has been but a false queen and a false wife."

The only strong point in Ahab's temperament was his pride. He could not believe these tidings of the deceit put upon him during all these years, and the fact that his wife and queen, who had

reigned so supremely over his heart, his kingdom, his people, and his religion, who had been the mother of his heirs, was not even a concubine; was no wife, no queen of his, but, worse than that, the wife of another man, and he, a herdsman, a captive, a leper, and a servant. Yea, and a servant to his most deadly enemy, the prophet Elijah! It was false. It could not be true, and yet —

“Bring forward thy proof, thou son of Belial,” he said.

“He is near,” replied Gehanan. “He came this day to the host with word from his master to the King of Judah. I will seek him.”

“Follow, guard him,” ordered the king, and two of his servants joined the eunuch.

Azalim was waiting by the tent of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, for any message for his master.

Gehanan did not communicate the real reason of his request, but only said that King Ahab, who was severely wounded, desired to see him.

When they came to the chariot of the dying king, Gehanan thus addressed him:

“Behold, O king, the husband of Jezebel, the queen.”

“Is this true?” whispered Ahab.

“Yea,” replied Azalim, too much taken by surprise to hesitate.

“Speak the truth, I charge thee as a dying man,” said Ahab, a deathly pallor spreading over his face.

“Speak. Art thou the husband of the — Queen — of Israel, and when, if so, didst thou wed her?”

Thus adjured, Azalim did speak the truth. “O king,” he replied, “I was a captive in the land of Syria, and Jezebel, the daughter of Baal’s high priest, condescended to favour me, thy servant, and we fled together to the land of Israel; there my present master, Elijah the prophet, gave her to me to wife.”

“And wast thou a leper as this slave declares?”

“Yea, my lord the king, I was stricken with leprosy before thy marriage with my wife.”

“The wife of another man, and he a leper,” groaned the king, “and she ruled myself, my state, ay, and caused me to forsake my God; and this woman, to whom I gave all, yielded all, was not even a concubine at my side. Can it be so? Is it true? Yea, I read its truth in thy face. I know it is so by my own heart, and lo! I have sold myself for naught. I have sinned in vain.”

Ahab tore the bandages from his wound, signed away the servants who would have replaced them, and fell back dead in his chariot just as the setting sun sank below the horizon. As he drew his last breath, the battle of Ramoth-Gilead ceased, and the

proclamation went throughout the host, "Every man to his city and every man to his own country!"

With the death of Ahab, a change came over the prosperity of Jezebel, not openly, but surely. The influence of a domineering, strong-willed woman over a weak husband is a very different thing from that of the same woman over her son, who, however weak, with rare exceptions dominates his mother. For example, in the matter of religion she had not succeeded, with all her bigotry, in making her children the followers of Baal. When Ahaziah, who succeeded his father, was sick, he sent to the god of flies, and not to the god of the sun for inquiry, and Jehoram, his successor, turned to the service of the calf, whilst Athaliah, Queen of Judah, made no attempt to introduce Baal into that kingdom.

Was it possible, Jezebel asked herself, that Beelzebub no longer found it to his interest to keep his word? She looked in her metal mirror and saw that a thicker layer of paint was needful to fill those deepening cross-lines upon her handsome face. Her form was losing its elastic grace and growing heavy in shape and movement, and, moreover, strength was beginning to fail. There was no doubt nature was about to send in her debt of decay, previous to the last heavy one of death. The future was not bright to Jezebel, and her

violence of temper and will increased with her darkening prospects, and this change did not add to her influence with her family or the nation. She was unaware of the fact that Ahab had been told of her marriage with Azalim, for Gehanan rightly judged it more for his own interest still to reserve the queen's secret, which had so long been as a mine of wealth to him.

Another omen affected Jezebel: Moloch, like herself, was showing signs of age, and what was worse, his familiar namesake did not now always obey the invocations and commands of his mistress. The dog was at times savage and dangerous, and the familiar careless and uncertain in its consultations, and the queen instinctively felt that the good things which had so long been hers were slipping from her grasp.

The real power and popularity of the religion of Baal was waning, although on the surface it still flourished. Jezebel maintained the prophets, and the houses of Baal were well attended. Since the slaughter of the priests on Mount Carmel, the candidates for the priesthood of Baal were fewer, and the persecution of the prophets of Jehovah by the queen more covert. Altogether the clouds were gathering fast over Jezebel's sky.

The glorious earthly end of Elijah had come.

Azalim had joined his master before the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, and witnessed that wonderful event. He had reported the little cloud that arose out of the sea after the hopeless announcement "There is nothing." He had been left to his sorrow alone at Beersheba when the prophet had that marvellous interview with his God in the wilderness of Sinai. He had waited at the foot of the hill when the fire fell from heaven on the captains and their fifties, and had stood afar off at the rapture of the mighty man of God — and then he was alone and desolate.

With the past wrecks of his life floating as it were around him, Azalim had but little heart to freight another vessel with mortal treasures. Love, wealth, health, all had gone down. Zillah he had lost for ever; Jezebel had betrayed him into sin and unutterable sorrow; prosperity was not for him. His life and soul had been content, satisfied, and fed, when with Elijah, but Elijah had departed, and he, — whither should he go?

His gloom did not last long. Among the sons of the prophets, there was not one found by their great head Elisha so filled with the spirit of the living God as Azalim, the son of Shinar. He had thrown in his lot with its brotherhood, and found peace. *

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNCOMMUTED SENTENCE

JORAM, the King of Israel, was at the palace of Jezreel, slowly recovering from the wounds he had received from the Syrians, and the queen-mother was expecting a visit of sympathy from her grandson, Ahaziah, King of Judah, who, with other members of the royal family of David, was on his way to Israel.

Jezebel was awaiting the arrival of her guests in the throne-room, where, for so many years, she had reigned it with Ahab. According to her wont, she was magnificently dressed; gems sparkled on her arms, in her ears, and in the diadem which crowned her carefully arranged hair, which, to all appearance, was as abundant as in youth. She was old now; long life had been hers, as well as every other good thing, and the thick layers of paint and tinted powder, which, without any attempt at disguise, covered her face, could not altogether conceal

it, although she still preserved her fine features, and a commanding presence. Moloch was by her side, — old, like his mistress, — but the herbs and treatment of the witches had kept him in remarkable health and strength. Gehanan, also, with gray hair, bowed to the ground before her, with professions of the greatest fidelity. He had grown rich with her gifts and appointments, and, if any living man owed gratitude to Jezebel, it surely was the prosperous eunuch.

The state of the king's health prevented ostentatious hospitality, but, in a quiet way, there was much feasting and amusement, and all was peace and security. Then, as is commonly the case, the shock came. The watchman on the tower gave the signal that an hostile force in great numbers was approaching, and soon the conspirator, Jehu, was upon the guilty house of Ahab.

A panic fell upon the inmates of the palace. They fled, or hid themselves. A trembling woman or two brought wild versions of the news to the queen-mother. She sent them to fetch Gehanan to her presence, but he was not to be found.

She was alone. All had deserted her. She looked around for Moloch. He, at least, would be faithful, and would protect her, and attack her enemies; but he, too, had disappeared.

The angry and alarmed woman stamped her foot, and, clenching her hand, walked through the long suites of apartments, seeking her son and grandson, or at least, tidings of them.

At last she encountered a woman slave, who was rushing in through the gardens, and learnt that the two kings were slain, and that the head captain in Ramoth-Gilead, Jehu, the son of Nimshi, was coming to seize the palace and the kingdom.

The indomitable woman rushed to the nearest window, and saw, entering the gate below, the resolute captain of the host, furiously driving his chariot toward the entrance doors.

She stretched her head out from the lattice as he passed under, and uttered her scornful half-taunt, half-curse. He looked up, with an answering challenge. "Who is on thy side? Who?" She turned to retreat, and lo! Gehanan stood by her side, and in the deadly hate and malice of his face she read her doom, and her fearless courage left her at last.

"Gehanan," she implored, in a shriek of supplication, "I have ever been thy good friend, oh, save me!" For answer, he made a signal to two of his eunuchs, who had followed him. They seized the wretched woman, and flung her, with brutal violence, from the window, against the walls and

pinriacles below, and the feet of the horses, and the wheels of the chariot, trod and rolled over her, and as yet she died not.

Jehu and his train and soldiers entered the ivory palace. Their ride had been long, and they were hungry. There was no delay in preparation, for the two kings had been feasting when surprised by Jehu, and their table was, consequently, left plentifully supplied. The spot where Jezebel lay was deserted, and there was no one to hear her groans or witness her sufferings, or attend to her cries for help. Was it the sight or smell of blood that attracted that gaunt, wolfish dog, who was crouching in an angle of the building, and furtively regarding her? And there was a sound of distant snarling from a pack of the dog scavengers of the city, who were approaching the spot. At this sound, the woman writhed in agony.

And now a strange coincidence occurred. Azalim, in his office as one of the disciples of the prophets, had been sent on a mission to Jezreel, and, impelled by some impulse stronger than mere curiosity, had followed the triumphal entrance of Jehu into the city. When the palace door closed behind the conquerors, Azalim was about to return to his friends, when cries for help and succour, in a woman's voice, arrested his steps, and caused him to

follow the direction from which they proceeded. He saw a wounded woman, lying in her blood, and uttering shrieks of piercing terror.

It needed not the regal robes, the jewelled crown and ornaments, the stately form, to tell Azalim that she who lay there, was Jezebel, his wife, and the titular Queen of Israel. The indifference, anger, aversion, hatred, which had successively filled his mind, and steeled his heart against her, fled away at the sight. It seemed to him as if the days of his youth came back, and he and his young, loved, and beautiful stolen bride were flying from pursuit, to love and happiness. He was kneeling at her side in a moment. "Jezebel," he cried, gently, "let me help thee. I am Azalim, thy husband. I grieve to see thee in this strait."

She turned her wild, haggard eyes upon him.

"Azalim," she whispered. "Ah! I know thee now. Never man loved me as thou didst, and I threw thee away for what is now going from me. Help me. See! See!" and she pointed to the dog, who had been skulking near, and was now stealthily approaching them, sniffing the air with an evil look in his bloodshot eyes, and his teeth showing through his slavering jaws. "See! See! it is Moloch! Listen! Listen! I hear the pack of wild dogs who are nearing us. Moloch, my faithful

Moloch, defend me from thy kind. Azalim, my young husband, protect me, as thou didst from the Syrian band on the Jordan banks. O Baal! O all ye Syrian gods, help! help! He is at my throat!"

It was true, the wolfish beast had leapt upon Jezebel, and torn a piece from her embroidered vest. In a moment, Azalim had flung himself upon the brute, and wrenched him from the queen's prostrate form. Then a fierce struggle took place between the man and the dog, in which, for some minutes, the strife was equal; whilst it was going on, the city pack came near and surrounded the group, uttering low howls, but not yet attacking their prey.

"Leave Moloch, Azalim, my once love, my husband!" cried Jezebel. "He, surely, will never attack me. And drive away the horrible pack. Come near to me. Come near, and let me rest my head upon thy shoulder, and they dare not touch me."

He obeyed. Jezebel's iron will and nerves of steel had kept her bodily sufferings in comparative abeyance, and she half raised herself into a sitting posture, but Azalim quietly laid her helpless body back.

"Tell me," she whispered, now in broken words, "did Ahab ever know that I was thy wife? Fear not to tell me the truth."

"Yea," whispered Azalim, in the same low tone, "he knew it as he died."

A change came over her features. A sob of anguish broke from her lips. She raised her head, and waved her hand.

"Jehovah, thou hast conquered," she cried.

Scarcely were the words out of her lips, ere, with a rush, Moloch sprung at her throat. The pack were on her body, and Jezebel's earthly voice and form were still for ever.

Azalim fled, in unutterable horror, remembering the word of the Lord, by the voice of Elijah, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel."

When the searchers came to look for Jezebel, they saw the body of the great dog Moloch, lying dead on the spot where Jezebel had fallen.

A long procession of mourners, greater in number, and with deeper sorrow than often follows a woman to her grave, wound from a white house, surrounded by gardens and vineyards, toward a sepulchre among the hills. She who lay white and swathed upon the open bier was a spiritual mother in Israel, and the love and tears that attended her last earthly journey did not soon pass away, nor did her memory fade with her generation. It was the

funeral of Zillah, the handmaid of the lepers, the princess daughter of the King of kings.

She had lived to a good old age, a life of holiness and work for her fellow creatures.

An old man was the chief mourner. A grand old man, who, for long years, has lived in high repute among the sons of the prophets, and had the high honour of being the servant of that mighty man of God, Elijah. The young people, who joined the procession, said, under their breath, that this old man, Azalim, the son of Shinar, had been the betrothed husband of the leper handmaid, but had left her for an outlandish woman, who had brought him to bitter and lifelong grief, and had caused Zillah to bewail her virginity on the mountains, and vow it in service to Israel and its God.

Again the years went by, and one evening, not long before sunset, a very old man, with long, white hair and snowy beard sweeping to his waist, knelt before a white sepulchre, on which was inscribed the name of Zillah.

Suddenly he looked up. There was a great light on the sky above him, — not a reflection of the setting sun, — but as though the opening of a cloud let out some wondrous glory behind.

The old man, Azalim, had seen that light before,

when he and she who slept within that sepulchre, saw a bright form ascend from the side of his beloved child.

Azalim fell upon his face. Then, rising, he looked again, and the light was gone. "I am ready," he said, softly. "Elijah, great master, Salome, Zillah, Astarté, I come to your God and mine." He seated himself upon a stone, close to the sepulchre, and leant his head against the tomb, folded his hands upon his staff, and closed his eyes.

There was a gasp, a sigh, a slight shiver of the frame, and then perfect stillness. Again the light opened in the sky above him, and Azalim, the herdsman of Gilead, the Syrian captive, the doorkeeper in the idol's house, the faithless lover, the real husband of the evil queen, the renegade to his country, the apostate to his religion, the leper, the rescuer of the prophets, the servant of Elijah, the son of the prophets, — Azalim, the repentant and forgiven sinner, was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

THE END.

L. C. Page & Company's **Announcement List** **of New Fiction**

Haunters of the Silences. BY CHARLES G.

D. ROBERTS, author of "Red Fox," "The Watchers of the Trails," etc.

Cloth, one volume, with many drawings by Charles Livingston Bull, four of which are in full color . \$2.00

The stories in Mr. Roberts's new collection are the strongest and best he has ever written.

He has largely taken for his subjects those animals rarely met with in books, whose lives are spent "In the Silences," where they are the supreme rulers. Mr. Roberts has written of them sympathetically, as always, but with fine regard for the scientific truth.

"As a writer about animals, Mr. Roberts occupies an enviable place. He is the most literary, as well as the most imaginative and vivid of all the nature writers." — *Brooklyn Eagle*.

"His animal stories are marvels of sympathetic science and literary exactness." — *New York World*.

The Lady of the Blue Motor. By

G. SIDNEY PATERNOSTER, author of "The Cruise of the Motor-Boat Conqueror," "The Motor Pirate," etc.

Cloth decorative, with a colored frontispiece by John C.

Frohn \$1.50

The Lady of the Blue Motor is an audacious heroine who drove her mysterious car at breakneck speed. Her plea for assistance in an adventure promising more than a spice of danger could not of course be disregarded by any gallant fellow motorist. Mr. Paternoster's hero rose promptly to the occasion. Across France they tore and across the English Channel. There, the escapade past, he lost her.

Mr. Paternoster, however, is generous, and allows the reader to follow their separate adventures until the Lady of the Blue Motor is found again and properly vindicated of all save womanly courage and affection. A unique romance, one continuous exciting series of adventure.

Clementina's Highwayman. By ROBERT

NEILSON STEPHENS, author of "The Flight of Georgiana," "An Enemy to the King," etc.

Cloth decorative, illustrated \$1.50

Mr. Stephens has put into his new book, "Clementina's Highwayman," the finest qualities of plot, construction, and literary finish.

The story is laid in the mid-Georgian period. It is a dashing, sparkling, vivacious comedy, with a heroine as lovely and changeable as an April day, and a hero all ardor and daring.

The exquisite quality of Mr. Stephens's literary style clothes the story in a rich but delicate word-fabric; and never before have his setting and atmosphere been so perfect.

The Sorceress of Rome. By NATHAN GAL- LIZIER, author of "Castel del Monte," etc.

Cloth decorative, illustrated \$1.50

The love-story of Otto III., the boy emperor, and Ste-
phania, wife of the Senator Crescentius of Rome, has
already been made the basis of various German poems and
plays.

Mr. Gallizier has used it for the main theme of "The
Sorceress of Rome," the second book of his trilogy of
romances on the mediæval life of Italy. In detail and
finish the book is a brilliant piece of work, describing
clearly an exciting and strenuous period. It possesses the
same qualities as "Castel del Monte," of which the *Chicago
Record Herald* said: "There is color, there is sumptuous
word-painting in these pages; the action is terrific at times;
vividness and life are in every part; brilliant descriptions
entertain the reader; mystic scenes and prophecies give a
singular fascination to the tale, which is strong and force-
ful in its portrayal."

Hester of the Hills. By GILDER CLAY.

Cloth decorative, illustrated \$1.50

"Hester of the Hills" has a motif unusual in life, and
new in fiction. Its hero, who has only acquired his own
strength and resourcefulness by a lifelong struggle against
constitutional frailty, has come to make the question of
bodily soundness his dominant thought. He resolves to
ensure strong constitutions to his children by marrying a
physically perfect woman. After long search, he finds this
ideal in Hester, the daughter of a "cracker squatter," of
the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. But,—he forgot to
take into consideration that very vital emotion, love, which
played havoc with his well-laid plans.

It is an ingenious combination of practical realism and
imaginative fiction worked out to a thoroughly delightful
and satisfying climax.

Prisoners of Fortune. A TALE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY. BY RUEL PERLEY SMITH, author of "The Rival Campers," etc.

Cloth decorative, with a colored frontispiece by Frank T. Merrill \$1.50

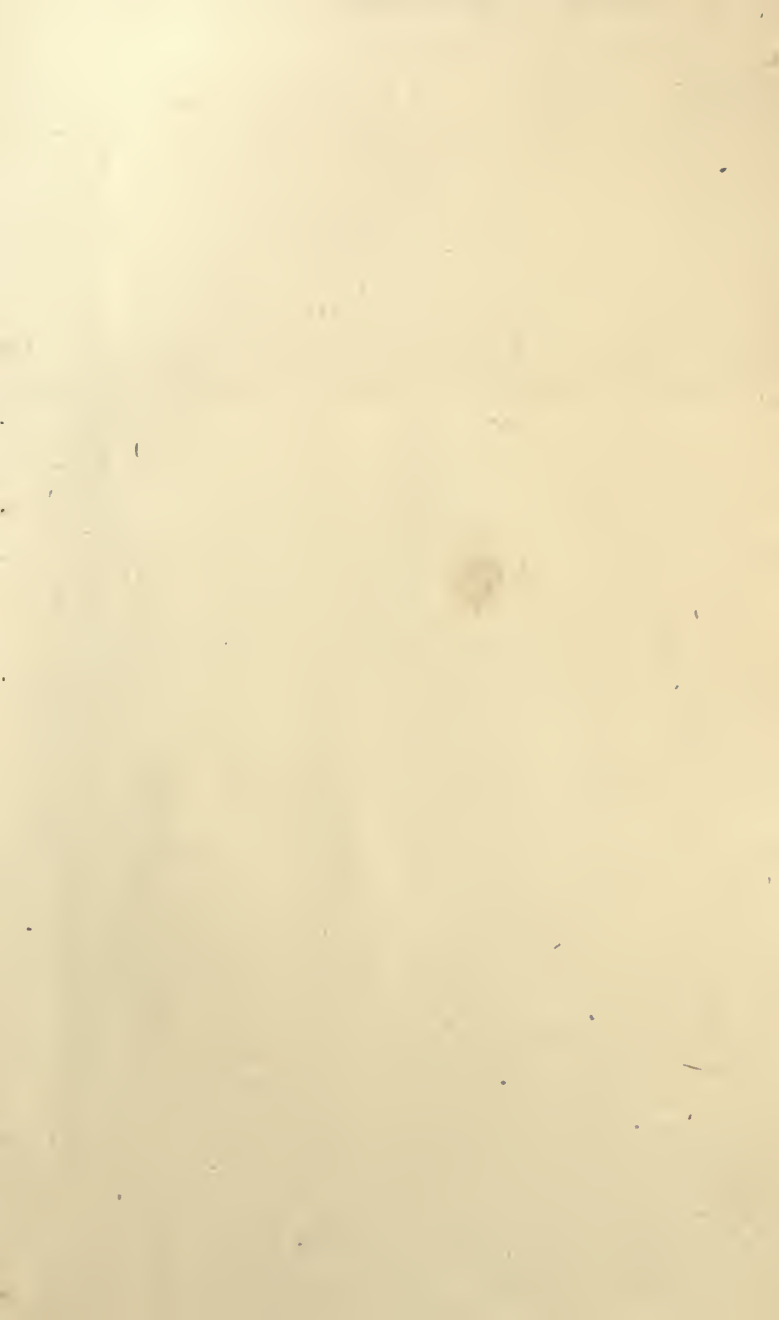
The period of Mr. Smith's story is the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the shores of the American colonies were harassed and the seas patrolled by pirates and buccaneers. These robbed and spoiled, and often seized and put to death, the sailors and fishers and other humbler folk, while their leaders claimed friendship alike with Southern planters and New England merchants,—with whom it is said they frequently divided their spoils.

The times were stern and the colonists were hardy, but they loved as truly and tenderly as in more peaceful days. Thus, while the hero's adventures with pirates and his search for their hidden treasure is a record of desperate encounters and daring deeds, his love-story and his winning of sweet Mary Vane is in delightful contrast.

The Rome Express. BY MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS, author of "The Passenger from Calais," etc.

Cloth decorative, with a colored frontispiece by A. O. Scott \$1.25

A mysterious murder on a flying express train, a wily Italian, a charming woman caught in the meshes of circumstantial evidence, a chivalrous Englishman, and a police force with a keen nose for the wrong clue, are the ingredients from which Major Griffiths has concocted a clever, up-to-date detective story. The book is bright and spirited, with rapid action, and consistent development which brings the story to a logical and dramatic ending.





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